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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Each member of the human race is entitled to a series of inalienable rights. These include one's right to life, one's right to be free from intentional infliction of bodily harm, and one's right to due process of law. Through the years, these "human rights" have been codified in various general international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and in such regional instruments as the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and the American Convention on Human Rights. These documents represent the foundation of the human rights community, fostering respect and dignity for the human form. As human rights pertain to all peoples of all ages, the human rights community felt it necessary to solidify such a notion in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention, adopted in 1989 after ten years of careful drafting, reflected a new vision of the child. Specifically, it declared that children were not the property of their parents, nor were they helpless objects of charity. Children, as adults in their community, were seen as people who had a voice. The 2002 International Law Students Association (ILSA) Fall Conference, entitled *Rights of the Child*, urged young members of the international law community to pay heed to such a voice.

The ILSA Fall Conference was inspiring. Conference panelists proved to be more than international human rights experts with personal agendas; they presented their cases in favor of children with immense passion and poise. Their presentations were electric, leaving conference participants with a hunger to learn more about the topic. In his keynote address to the 2002 Conference attendees, Professor Jaap E. Doek, Chairperson of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, challenged the United States and its legal community to embrace the Convention and its policies. Dr. Ursula Kilkelly, Faculty of Law at the University College Cork, Ireland, advocated a new human rights regime in favor of children as "people" and outlined her own nation's implementation of the Convention. During the most emotional commentary of the conference, Mr. Bruce Harris, Executive Director of Casa-Alianza, informed student participants that he was tired of burying children who had been murdered on the streets of Latin America. Such firsthand accounts cannot be ignored.

The following issue retells some of the stories articulated at the ILSA Fall Conference and aspires to place the recent children's rights movement in its proper historical, cultural, and legal context. The Conference consisted of four main panels discussing the following: children as refugees and displaced persons, children and armed conflicts, economic exploitation of children, and the United States and its participation in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Each of these four panels are represented in this issue. There was also a student panel concerned with children and health law. These students will be our next generation of advocates for children's rights, and their stories are also included herein. While the authors may present opposing views, each has one thing in common: the desire for adequate protection for children in an ever-changing and dangerous world.

While seemingly rudimentary on paper, children's rights prove extremely difficult to protect. The organizers of the 2002 ILSA Fall Conference hoped to highlight these difficulties and, more importantly, solicit experts for their opinions as to how the legal community could enact substantive change. Simply, awareness without change is an empty promise. As members of the international human rights community, we owe more to the children of the world.

Hailed as a success by both participants and panelists, the conference effort was truly that of a team. As the conference chair, I would like to take this time to thank the following faculty advisers and student volunteers for their intense spirit and effort: Professor Derek Jinks, Professor Maria Frankowska, Professor Henry Ordower, Professor David Sloss, Professor Nan Kaufman, Ms. Lisa Thompson, Ms. Edna McLain, Ms. Jacqueline Fanning, Mrs. Amy Westermann, Mr. Jonathon Moberly, Mr. Christopher Galli, Ms. Jennifer Matthew, Ms. Stacey Gill, Ms. Dianne Morris and Ms. Kay Graeff. I would also like to thank the editorial board and staff of the Saint Louis University *Public Law Review* for their hard work and dedication in publishing this important issue.

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