

Commissioner for Children MALTA

Address: Palazzo Ferreria,
Republic str,
Valletta, Malta

Mrs Sonia Camilleri, Commissioner for Children
Tel: 00356 2590 3105
Mob: 00356 9980 2467
Email: sonia.camilleri@gov.mt

Ms Daniela DeBono, R&D and Int'l Rels
Tel: 00356 2590 3104/5
Mob: 00356 9985 5490
Email: daniela.debono@gov.mt

Composition of Office

The Commissioner for Children's Act was passed through Parliament on the 5th of December 2003, and Mrs Sonia Camilleri started her mandate on the 16th December 2003 on a part time basis.

Since May 2004 the Office is composed of a:
Research, Development & International Relations Executive (Full-time)
Office Secretary (Full-time)
Educational Issues Officer (Part-time)
Legal Advisor (2 hour a week)

Council for Children [ref. Chap 462; Art 12]

The Council for Children is made up of:

- the Commissioner as Chairperson
- six other members appointed by different Ministers and the Parliamentary Committee
- two other members co-opted by the Council
- two children and young persons (11 & 14) elected by the Group of Ambassadors of Children's Rights and co-opted by the Council
- one young person (16 year old) nominated by the National Commission Persons with Disability and co-opted by the Council

The Council meets once a month and has been meeting since the 13th of February 2004.

Group of Ambassadors of Children's Rights

Following a call from the Commissioner for Children for interested children and young people to form part of the Council for Children, a group of children and young people wrote to our Office showing their interest in children's rights and in the Office of the Commissioner for Children.

The Office organized a half day together on the 3rd of July 2004. The programme consisted of an introduction and explanation of children's rights by the Commissioner for Children and smaller group discussions on children's rights and their experience.

On the 19th of July 2004 the same group met again and elected two representatives to form part of the Council for Children. The rest of the children and young people made a commitment to get to promote children's rights in their families, communities and schools.

Since then this Group has met in September 2004. The Commissioner presents her ideas to this Group and gets feedback via email and during the meetings

Achievements

- Opening of the Masters of Psychology Course at the University of Malta
- The Chief Justice, after a joint effort between our office and the Ministry's Children's Advisory Board, asked the Minister for Justice for another Judge for the newly established Family Court which to date only has one Judge. The Chief Justice on our list of recommendations also appointed a magistrate to deal exclusively with Child Abuse Cases.
- After a report and pressure from the Commissioner, the government employed three social workers to monitor the fostering of eighty-six children - their fostering had been stalled for the lack of these social workers.

Main Issues Handled

- Juvenile Justice
 - i. Victims of Crime
 - ii. Probation Officers
 - iii. Visited inmates at YOURS (Young Offenders Unit Rehabilitational Services)
 - iv. Attended Juvenile Court Session
- The Voice of the Child in Court
- Gathering of information for the UN Questionnaire on Violence Against Children
- Irregular immigrants
 - i. Families with young children
 - ii. Unaccompanied Minors
- Promoting the signing and ratifying of the Oviedo Convention and asking for a national legal framework of bioethics for the country.

Supporting Children and Young People

- *Malta Skaters United (MSU)*

The MSU are a group of young skateboarders and skaters mainly between 11 and 17 years of age. They regularly meet in a subway which is government property to skate and have put up skating ramps.

They have been cleaning the area regularly, painting off rude graffiti and organised awareness raising events to promote skating as a sport and alternative leisure activity.

Our Office has helped MSU in several organisational aspects and guided them through the government offices to get the necessary permits.

MSU is currently in the last stages of negotiation with the government. A contract is being drafted between MSU and the government, which will allow MSU to develop the site better.

Their website is www.maltaskatersunited.org

- *Malta Girl Guides*

The Malta Girl Guides are currently into the first year of a three year international campaign Our Rights: Our Responsibilities. The Commissioner for Children has widely supported this campaign, participated in seminars and radio programmes and helped in the drafting of policy guidelines for the recruitment of young leaders.

Schools - Educational Issues

- Visited children and young people in 5 primary schools and 3 secondary schools
- Spoke to parents and teachers of another 5 primary and secondary schools
- Schools for the severely disabled
- Visited Summer Schools for Children - KidStart
- School Supervision
- School Curriculum
- Better layout of exam timetables

Projects

- Weekend of activities on the occasion of World Day of Life to introduce the Commissioner with children and young people
- The Rights of the Unborn Child, a seminar organised in collaboration with the Group for the Unborn Child (umbrella group of different NGOs)
- The setting up of Group of Ambassadors of Children

Ongoing Projects

- Competition for Official Logo Design for the Office of the Commissioner for Children
- World Children's Day: Programme in schools, villages, parishes, media
- Rights, Respect & Responsibilities: A Children's Rights Course for Children and Young People

Other Issues

The Commissioner for Children can also receive individual complaints as long as local existing remedies have been exhausted. This has been instrumental in slowly getting together a bird's eye view of the situation of children and young people in Malta, particularly those gaps in the system which are lacking or not being catered for. The following is a list of issues which have come up:

- Bullying
- Cases of Separation: fast tracking of civil cases of separation pending for 7 years
- Child Abuse
- Children's Participation
- Children's songs festivals
- Children's & Youth Local Councils
- Disabled young people
- Dyslexia
- Foster Families
- Gay Rights & Bullying
- Greater participation and preparation for life in children's homes
- Media Education for Children
- New smoking regulations
- Situation of children and young people in Gozo
- Teenage Mothers

Policy

The Office has taken part and provided feedback on the following:

- Questionnaire on the Internet distributed in all schools together with the National Statistics Office
- Consultation Day - National Action Plan on Social Inclusion
- Early Childhood Day Care Centres
- Broadcasting Guidelines for the Portrayal of Vulnerable Persons

Public Relations

In this first year of operation, public relations of the Commissioner for Children have been very important. It is important for children, young people and others to get to know the Commissioner for Children and what her role is.

Mrs Camilleri is thus frequently present at Seminars & conferences; and giving talks or facilitating discussion of children, young people & adults both in schools and in their local community organisations.

She has also kept her presence on the media (TV, Radio, Newspapers, Children's Newspapers) regular in this last year. There have also been several Press Releases issues and Press Conferences. The Media was also invited to key activities organized by the Office.

From October 2004 the Office has been invited to discuss issues of children's rights on a radio programme every fortnight for one hour.

We are also coordinating a regular presence on the written media

International Relations

International relations are important to our Office to:

1. Keep ourselves informed of the way other offices with mandates which are similar to ours are operating and the challenges they are facing
2. Promote greater awareness of children and young people's realities in other countries
3. Keep up to date with major issues and violations of children's rights internationally
4. Keep alive the universal aspect of the Convention and children's rights even in the presentation of children's rights.

Challenges for our Office

- Communicating with children and young people
- Participation of children and young people in the decisions that affect their lives
- Placing children on the government's agenda
- Pressure on the government to pass the Children Act
- Greater financial resources
- Delineating of roles with other government departments

Office of the Commissioner for Children, Malta
8th October 2004