



Ethnic Child Care Development Unit

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COMMENTS ON THE AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE TO CHILDREN ...THE ALTERNATIVE REPORT DRAFT ON THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD BY VIVI GERMANOS-KOUTSOUNADIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ETHNIC CHILD CARE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES CO-OP. LTD, REPRESENTATIVE OF FECCA.

GENERAL COMMENTS

INTRODUCTION (Preamble)

There has been no consultation whatsoever with people from Non-English Speaking background in producing Australia's Report to CRC and there is no mention at all about the special needs of NESB children and young people in the General Measures of Implementation.

There should be consultations with the ethnic communities as children and young people from NESB constitute some 20% of the population. The NGO which represents the ethnic communities is FECCA at national level and the Ethnic Communities Councils at State/Territory level. Also the recently formed National Peak Ethnic Children's Services Group is aware of the needs of NESB children and families and can provide input in the consultations.

AUSTRALIA'S REPORT - OVERALL COMMENTS

The report is only the response by the State and Federal government on what is already in existence but does not include any information or services which are provided by the NG sector often without any government assistance. For example home language maintenance has been promoted and nurtured by the many ethnic communities with their Saturday and afternoon ethnic schools as these languages are not an integral part of the school curriculum.

Also it does not reflect or provide some of the programmes which are funded by various State and federal government departments to make the services relevant and accessible to special needs groups. One good example is the special services funding which is provided by the Department of Human Services and Health under its Children's Services Program to community services to implements its Access and Equity policy. Some innovative models of service delivery have been developed to accommodate the special needs of NESB,

ATSI, children with disabilities and those living in remote and isolated areas within the mainstream services. These are the Ethnic Child Care/Multicultural Units in various states, the SUPS program to assist and integrate NESB and Children with disabilities in children's services, The Casual Ethnic Workers Pools, the Multicultural Resource Centres etc.

It does not mention policies such as the National Agenda on Multiculturalism, the National Language Policy, Access and Equity Plans of all federal government departments, its Social Justice policies and other innovative policies which were instituted to deal with inequities, disadvantage, lack of access to services because of cultural/linguistic and other barriers which precluded people from diverse backgrounds to have equal access to resources and participation in the community.

The report does not take into consideration or make provision to incorporate the principles and strategies developed by various government departments and major changes to the structures and fabric of our society which are proposed by the various discussion papers and Consultations resulting from COAG on child care, community welfare and health which will impact in the lives of families and children in the future, the EPAC discussion paper on the Future of Child Care in Australia and the excellent reports of the Law Reform Commission of Child Care. However, as the Commission's and the Human Right Commission funding has been drastically cut it is questionable of how much further work they can do in these areas.

The report does not mention some of these effective, practical measures which are in existence to promote and safeguard the well being of children.

The federal government must maintain its involvement in the Children's Services program and continue to provide resources for children with special needs to enable them to have equal access to services.

There is no comprehensive Plan of Action of how it proposes to implement the Articles of the Convention on a long term basis within its legislative, regulations, departmental structures, funding and service delivery guidelines and implementation of these at the direct service delivery level both at State/Territory, Local Government, federal government and community levels. There is no co-ordinating body responsible for overseeing and monitoring the implementation of the Convention at these various levels. Such Plan to be effective should be developed in partnership with open and honest consultation with all the stakeholders with opportunities for input by all with a delineation of the responsibilities and tasks for each one and practical steps of how the aims and objectives of the Plan are to be achieved. Adequate resources are to be allocated for this to happen.

The Articles of the Convention should be incorporated in all departmental, service structures, policies and should be an integral part of their operation and not marginalised.

The implementation of the Convention will give an opportunity to the federal government to reinforce multiculturalism as the articles guarantee certain basic cultural and other rights to minority ethnic, indigenous and religiously diverse groups.

The government needs to have a publicity campaign to inform families, children, young people and those who work with children about the Convention and rights of children. Children need to know about their rights and how to exercise them. They need to make reports such as CROC widely available to all children's, youth, welfare, health, social and other organisations and invite comments before they submit it to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The Convention should be a part of the curriculum in schools and an integral part of the education of children from pre-school to school age.

Federal legislation should be enacted specially for the Rights of the Child in order to implement the articles of the Convention and State/Territories should also enact such legislation to ensure that they will implement the Convention. A National Commissioner for Children should be appointed similar to the Racial Discrimination Commission of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission with resources to deal with breach of the Articles of the Convention by individuals or institutions and to hear complaints to do publicity and education of the community on the rights of the child.

ARTICLE 2.

Ethnic and Aboriginal communities have always experienced some kind of discrimination, in either covert or overt forms. With the present rise in racist activities throughout Australia, we hope that the Convention will commit the government to take firm action against all forms of discrimination. This is important for ethnic communities in that, despite policies and statements by governments, children of immigrants are being discriminated against concerning language, culture and religion.

They are not provided with opportunities to maintain their home language in preschools and the school system as these are not part of the curriculum. Language and culture are intertwined, therefore, the children of NESB are denied their right to continue and practice their home language and culture with the families and their ethnic community. NESB parents are disadvantaged and unable to exercise their right in dealing with systems because of language/cultural barriers as interpreters/translated information are not

mandatory in courts of law and in the various educational, community, legal and other institutions. The acknowledgment of religious observances and celebrations of other religious denominations than Catholic and Anglican are not practiced by various institutions and the government thus denying other religious groups their right to observe their religious ceremonies and festivities.

There is a need to acknowledge the diverse cultural, linguistic, religious, social and other practices of our diverse population and as far as possible acknowledge and accommodate these in their operations and structures.

The anti-Discrimination laws do not provide for children and they are rarely heard. Also different state have different discrimination laws with different interpretations. The education system discriminates against children who are poor as they cannot afford to pay for various activities. Those with special needs such as children with disabilities are excluded instead of being included and provisions made in the school system to enable them to participate. Children of NESB and Aboriginal whose language and culture is not provided in the education system but is left to the discretion of the headmaster. Children have no say in the development of school curriculum, rules, discipline which affect them.

ARTICLE 3

Who determines what is the best interest of the child? The State, the parents, the community, the institution and how are differing views to be reconciled? How can the child present his/her viewpoint if they are dominated and depend on adults for their various needs? There is need for attitudinal change in relation to how children are viewed by the community and their capacity and ability to speak up for themselves and to be given the opportunity to express their views in different situations with the appropriate support to enable them to do this. There is no comprehensive information, strategies and mechanisms on how this is to be achieved.

Children of NESB and Aboriginal are disadvantaged because their linguistic and cultural differences are not recognised by the Anglo professionals/ service providers, government departments who deal with their cases and allocate resources for service delivery. In children's services, there are no complains mechanisms for the parents and children regarding the services. The state regulations provide for minimum standards of care which often disadvantage the children in many areas. The cut in recurrent funding affects the quality of service. The lack of resources for integrating children with disabilities in services and schools disadvantages and precludes these children from reaching their potential development.

The government decisions such as the 2 year wait for newly arrived immigrants to claim benefits, medical/hospital benefits, child care assistance is not to the best interest of the child and children will suffer and have no means of support and suffer hardship. The governments' economic rational and privatisation of essential services is detrimental to the interest of the child as low income families and those living below the poverty line are the ones which suffer in any cost cutting exercises by the government. There are no safeguards for children when government makes these decisions and enacts legislation to impose them.

ARTICLE 4.

It is imperative that National and State legislation is enacted on the Rights of the Child and a National Agenda on the Rights of the Child to be developed. An Office of Status of Children, a Commissioner for Children to be set up to have the responsibility of implementing the Convention, monitoring its implementation, publicising and educating the public and children on their rights otherwise nothing will happen if ad hoc attempts are made to include different aspects of the articles in existing legislation.

It is becoming more and more evident that there is a need for protecting children both at home and in the community from those who have responsibility for their welfare, be they parents, guardians, custodians, educators or strangers from many forms of abuse, therefore, there is need for uniform legislative measures/strategies to protect these children and enable them to speak up about their experiences and take action against those who perpetrate the abuse.

It is also evident from the high youth suicides, unemployment amongst young people and increase in crime, drug and alcohol abuse amongst young people that we as a society, government, parents and community are failing our young people, therefore, it is important for us to establish a Ministry of Children/Youth similar to the Ageing to give special attention to their needs and to implement the articles of the Convention.

We have a moral obligation to listen to our children and young people and they are telling us clearly by the above actions that they need a voice to express their needs, their suffering, their concerns, their fears, their hopes, their problems, their visions of the present and future to us the adults who are often responsible for their suffering because we do not allow them to speak up and listen to them. Something is very wrong in our society if our children from very young age contemplate suicide and many cut their lives at the bud and we adults question and ask why but do not go further to ask the young people themselves and allow them to tell us. They need the means by which they feel that they are valued, wanted, respected and that they count and are not the property of adults. The legislative measures will give them some recognition of their importance as

members of our society and the means by which they can express themselves and their needs.

In the Children's services area, there are no standard regulations of care. Each state have their own regulations with different levels of quality of care. There is no standard programming, it is left to the discretion of the teachers with no monitoring mechanisms for quality.

ARTICLES 5, 10,22, 20

The Convention recognises the need for children to be surrounded by family members and to be cared for in an environment of happiness, love and understanding. It is important to recognise the different types of families and self-identification of families calling in mind that many immigrant communities have extended families. Recognition must be given to the reality that families are not always united and may at times be divided by distance and international conditions beyond their control. This should be recognised and allow for family reunion not only of immediate members but extended.

The laws of the federal and State governments do not take into consideration the extended family in cases of foster care, family law matters of custody and guardianship.

The reunification of families is becoming more difficult with the point system which applies to family reunion members where English knowledge and employability are heavily weighted. This discriminates against NESB migrants.

In the case of young refugees protection is to be given to the child by the government and assist them to trace their families and to be reunited with them. However, in the case where a member of the family overseas has a disability then the whole family are not allowed to migrate because the Immigration laws of Australia do not allow the entry of people with disabilities to Australia. This prevents many refugee families and children being reunited.

In discussing the child's upbringing, the rights of children who may be rendered parentless have the right to be raised among other things in continuation of that child's ethnic, religious cultural and linguistic background. This is of great concern to people of NESB. Not all children are assured of the attempt to find culturally appropriate foster parents. In some states in Australia, this is not even considered an issue.

ARTICLES 7, 8, 9.

The rights of Australian born children of illegal immigrants to stay in Australia should be guaranteed and he/she be accorded full citizenship status. Being

Australian the children should have the right to be cared for by their parents. Presently in Australia these children do not have any of these rights. Children of immigrants who come to Australia and need to have benefits because their parents experience hardship cannot obtain any assistance for the first two years. Nor can they attend child care services as their parents are not entitled child care assistance. The children who are deported with their parents most often go into situations where their lives are sometimes at risk and their opportunities in life limited and their quality of life suffers.

In other situations, Australian born children of Australian residents are taken overseas by their parent/s are not entitled to benefits of Australian residency, since its parents are not entitled to benefits for the children. There is an expectation that the parents will be responsible for the children's maintenance. Children need income security to be able to develop physically, emotionally, intellectually and socially and become a useful member of society.

In cases of separation of the parents where the custodial parent lives in Australia and the non-custodial parent lives overseas, there is no provision by law to allow the custodial parent to claim maintenance for the child under the child support system.

The Convention stresses the importance of preserving a child's own identity without unlawful interference, defining identity in terms of nationality, name and family relations. Australia's public arena, including Federal and State governments, the media, the education system, does not encourage self-identification of ethnic minority groups. Many children are forced by the attitudes and practices of various institutions to "anglicise" their names to avoid the stigma of ethnic identification, although they themselves may be content in their ethnic community life. This alienates young children from their ethnic community and the Australian community or both, resulting in the fragmentation of their development. Also it causes conflict between them and their parents and often rejection of their home culture and their parents leading into break down of the family.

Of concern is the increasing numbers compared to the Australian population of children and young people of NESB who are placed in the care of the State in institutions (NSW) and are separated from their parents. Little research is being done to determine the cause. Is it because the NESB parents do not understand the system, their and their children's rights and do not challenge the decisions to remove their children from their care. Or is it subtle discrimination on the part of the law enforcing bodies and legal system which is not sensitive to cultural/linguistic, social factors. Also NESB parents do not understand the appeals systems as information is not provided in other languages to appeal against the decision of the State. Also a substantial number of children of

immigrants live in poverty as has been demonstrated by studies by the Brotherhood of St. Lawrence and these children are at risk of abuse, disadvantaged economically and socially and their parents are powerless and cannot protect their rights, therefore, are more likely to have their parental roles and authority challenged by the system. These parents do not understand the system and their rights about placement reviews as specified in Article 25 and the reviews are done by professionals who are often not aware of cultural, social, religious, extended family rights and linguistic factors which have an important implication on the outcome of such reviews.

The rights of children whose parents are illegal immigrants and are in detention (boat people), are often non-existent. These children belong nowhere as they are stateless until their parents are given status. Their rights should be respected and they should be given equal treatment and what is accorded to Australian children. They should not be separated from their parents.

ARTICLE 17

Parents and children of NESB do not have adequate access to information as it is not translated in other languages and presented in ways which will enable those who are illiterate to understand it. The pre-school children are forced to discard their home language as there is no information and tuition in their home language but it is entirely in English. There is no bilingual education to enable these children to continue to learn the two languages together.

The mass media in Australia is powerful. They have great influence over people's opinions, often being the prime source of information and so they should act in a responsible and sensitive manner. Irresponsible sensationalised representation of ethnic communities encourages racial tension and is detrimental to community relations. It would be beneficial for all people if culturally and linguistically diverse items are presented in everyday media coverage. Also parents do not have much choice in selecting TV programs which are non-violent, non-sexist and non-biased and stereotype people according to their appearance, class, etc. Children's TV is not well developed in Australia where we have local productions which are relevant and reflect the Australian way of life. The production of pornographic material using children should be banned and stricter laws imposed on the use and distribution of such material. The unrealistic portrayal of families, young people, ideal parents, women as objects of perfect physical beauty by the media creates conflict within the families and a wrong view is presented of the reality which exists in the community where diversity in all its forms exists but not reflected in the media.

ARTICLE 18

The rights of children of working parents to have child care is one area where the governments have made provisions and priority of access to child care places is for children of working parents. However, this discriminates children whose parents are unemployed or who choose to stay home. It is imperative for every child's development to have access to structured, affordable, quality, culturally/linguistically appropriate child care. Children who are disadvantaged economically, socially, are disabled need the benefit of the constructive environment of child care to counterbalance the disadvantages of their home environment. In services which are provided for children, often the rights of the children are secondary to those of parents. In child care, the parents right to work is a priority rather than the children's right to universal quality care. Children have no rights to complain if the service provided to them is not adequate but they have no way in making their rights and needs heard. There is also no complaints mechanism for parents who use the services especially those in the commercial sector.

Families from NESB, Aboriginal and those with children with disabilities experience difficulties in accessing child care services as their structures, procedures and attitudes often create barriers of access for these groups. At times, conflict results with the mainstream services who do not acknowledge or accommodate the diverse child rearing and caring practices and promotion of minority children's languages and culture in their service delivery, thus denying these children and their families their basic rights. The governments have instituted policies to overcome these barriers and we have achieved some access of these services but equity is still to be achieved as often these special needs require commitment of funds by the governments to be implemented.

ARTICLE 19

This area is one where in recent times has had media coverage and it is obvious that all forms of child abuse are occurring in our society but people are not able to come forward to speak about it. If they do, then the services for dealing with the reporting are so under resourced that it takes months before cases are investigated. In some states there are mandatory reporting mechanisms. There is lack of national legislation on child protection and abuse. Each state have their own legislation. The federal government have limited or no powers to impose legislative or other measures in relation to the protection and prevention of abuse.

The National Child Protection Council is only an advisory body and its only area of involvement is in research on issues and consultations on the Prevention of Abuse and Neglect. It has no power, limited resources and scope of its activities.

Recent events with the Woods Royal Commission on Paedophilia, here and overseas, has demonstrated the extent of the problem and the inability of the federal government to act. It is hoped that the federal government will do a National Inquiry on paedophilia especially in institutions which are set up to protect children and give an opportunity to the victims to come forward to report their experiences and take steps to prevent these happenings in the system and the community.

There have been Consultation and research reports done and excellent recommendations contained in the NSW Report on Culture, No Excuse for Child Abuse and the NCPC Plan of Action for the Prevention of Abuse and Neglect of NESB children, Children with Disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children. Resources should be allocated by the Federal government to these communities to implement at a local level the recommendations from these reports.

There is a need for data collection for NESB, Aboriginal children and those with disabilities who are abused as these are necessary for planning of services to meet their needs. A national data base needs to be set up by the federal government to co-ordinate the data collection to provide a national picture of the problem and direction of resources in areas of greatest need.

In NSW the Children (Protection and Care) Act is being reviewed and opportunities will be provided to make input on the special needs of NESB, ATSI and children with disabilities, however, there is no national legislation for the protection of care of all children. There is need to have national legislation and a co-ordinating responsibility by the federal government with allocation of resources similar to the National child care strategy .

ARTICLE 23.

The needs of children with disabilities are often not considered by State, Federal and Local government. In education there is no inclusive education policies and if there are there are no resources allocated to provide for the support and special needs of children with disabilities, therefore, they become segregated and are not given opportunities accorded to other children. In the early childhood area 0-5 year olds, children with disabilities are not integrated into services because of lack of specialised staff, equipment. There are some programs such as the SUPS disability and Casual Ethnic Workers Pools, but only in some states. These are special programs which are affected by cut backs.

Also few children with disabilities have access to After and Before School Care and Vacation Care because programs cannot cope with their extra needs and

support without additional funding. The Respite Care provided to families with children with disabilities is often inadequate, thus parents/carers become stressed and these children are potentially "at risk of abuse". In the case of NESB parents/carers because of language barriers they do not have access to these services, early intervention and support systems to assist them in caring for their disabled children. Post School Options and Employment programs for young people with disabilities are limited especially for those with high support needs who suffer socio-economic disadvantage and are unable to buy services in the present climate of economic rationalism, privatisation and user pay. Further for NESB and ATSI young people with disabilities, services are not sensitive to cultural/linguistic/ethnic communities needs to enable these groups to gain equitable access to services to gain independence and become self-sufficient.

Often the wishes and views of the children and young people with disabilities are not considered as the carers and family does not allow them to express these. The importance of Advocacy Services to assist the children and young people are imperative, however, in the case of children there are practically no Advocacy Services to advocate on their behalf if there is conflict between them and their carers/parents.

There are some programs funded under the Department of Health and Family Services, within the Children's Services Program to integrate children in children's services but the resources provided are limited. These are the SUPS program and the CEWP which are funded to provide services with assistance with the integration of children with disabilities. The HACC program provides for Respite care programs and the CRC funding for respite to carers. However, the issue for most programs is lack of provision for transport which precludes many of these children participating in the activities.

The disability legislation like DSA, CSDA, DDA, do not specify for the special needs of children in the policies and the service delivery and implementation of the principles of these legislation. Also there is lack of co-ordination between the states and federal government regarding the education and health and other needs of children with no department taking full responsibility for all age groups from pre-school 0 - 5 years and 5 - 18 years.

The needs of children with disabilities together with NESB and ATSI are marginalised and are not included in the mainstream policies and service delivery and provisions to be made within their structure to accommodate these needs. The NESB and ATSI children with disabilities suffer "a double disadvantage", that of their disability and cultural/linguistic and other factors.

Those children who suffer mental health problems are disadvantaged as the service delivery mainly deals with adults and there are few specialist services for

children. The whole area of mental health has been grossly neglected and it only recently that attention has been drawn to this area. The high suicide rate amongst young people in Australia needs to alert us to look at the mental health of children from early childhood and develop preventative programs and strategies to diagnose and assist children who may be at risk of developing mental health problems from early age. This needs to happen in child care services with the provision of quality care for our children and education of parents in child development, caring and rearing practices and early intervention. All these services need to be provided with the minimum fee and free of charge to those children who experience economic and other disadvantages.

ARTICLE 24.

The health system is not geared towards the needs of children. The public hospital systems are so overcrowded that there are long waiting periods for operations, treatment, specialist services. Those who are disadvantaged socially and economically are also disadvantaged in obtaining necessary health services. The thousands of children living in poverty and homelessness do not have adequate access to health care. People from NESB, ATSI have a double disadvantage as lack of information and sensitivity to cultural and other issues precludes them from obtaining health care. The governments decision to impose a doctors fee for all will further disadvantage those who are already disadvantaged. Families on above low income range who do not qualify for medical and pharmaceutical benefits and other health services find it extremely difficult to obtain adequate health care.

The state of health of Aboriginal children is a disgrace to this country. The infant mortality rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is five times higher than for white Caucasians and high amongst NESB communities compared to Anglo- Australians. In some states, ATSI children live in dire poverty where the necessities of clean water, sanitation, housing, lighting, immunisation and other diseases and nutrition are having a devastating effect on their lives. Young ATSI people suffer psychological problems with little support to overcome them. Those who were taken away from their families by the authorities to be "assimilated in the white society" and are finding out about their identity suffer devastating, emotional psychological and identity problems with very few or no resources allocated to provide counselling for them to overcome the repressed feelings, their emotional upheavals and others the hope of finding their identity and their families. Some of the ATSI and other families living in poverty in 1996 live in Dickensian and third world conditions in our affluent society

ARTICLE 26.

Income security for all children and families is important for quality of life for all people in Australia. Governments are responsible for providing resources to enable all people to achieve this. We rank as one of the highest paying taxation country in the world. We pay these taxes to enable the government to provide essential services and income support to those who are disadvantaged for various reasons. However, often the government's priorities of spending money are different to the people who are in need, therefore, those most in need often do not get assistance or the assistance is inadequate and there is inequity in the allocation of resources.

As stated above the research undertaken by the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, showed that a high proportion children of migrants in the inner suburbs of Melbourne live in poverty. This is similar to those living in the inner Sydney metropolitan regions. Young people of NESB, ATSI and those with disabilities are disadvantaged when seeking employment. Because many have traditional family structures where the family cares for their members they are unable to claim social security payments, because of the combined family income. Also many NESB parents are not aware of the social security system here in Australia and cultural factors, such as not admitting they have a problem or children with disabilities, do not make claims for benefits and pensions therefore, they miss out on economic assistance which is available to all people.

The decision by the federal government when they came into office to cut millions of dollars from the youth employment and training programs (some \$500m.), is inconsistent with the implementation of this article as the living standard of these young people will be further eroded and their chances in life limited. It is no wonder that young people commit suicide as they see no future and a hopelessness and powerlessness as they see themselves as an underclass of Australian society and marginalised. These are some of the worrying features of our Australian society and we need to look at them carefully.

The decision of the federal government to have a waiting period of 2 years for newly arrived immigrants to Australia will adversely affect children and families who are most vulnerable. This is discriminatory and creates two classes of people in our society. Immigrants will be denied equal rights that all Australian's have by the virtue of their citizenship and an underclass will form. This too is contrary to the Social Justice policies of the government of equal access to resources by all Australians.

ARTICLE 30.

The Convention guarantees the child the right, in community with other members of its group, to enjoy its own culture, to profess and practice its own religion and to use its own language.

At present, no official instrument exists which compels State and Federal governments to provide for the linguistic, cultural and religious rights of children from ethnic minorities and indigenous groups. Different States have some policies but implementation of them has been lacking. The community languages policy of NSW is left up to the discretion of the headmaster and the lack of resources is usually the excuse used by them not to implement and start classes even in areas where there is a high proportion of children of a particular ethnic group. In some states like Queensland, there is no acknowledgment or recognition of these rights.

The Federal government has some policies, but these are ineffectual as most often they are tied to funding allocations which are subject to budgetary restraints and scrutiny. Most often these have no legislative base, are seen as temporary and peripheral and are cut without warning.

Australians' speak some 90 languages and some 25% of children enter preschool with another language than English as their first language, but there are practically no home language maintenance programs in preschools, or bilingual teaching, therefore, these children lose their first language and this is a waste of resource for the children, their family and their community and the Australian community as a whole.

The loss of home language has deeper implications for the children and their families. It affects their interpersonal relationships, their bonding with their parents, the deeper emotional and psychological aspects of communication and understanding between them and their parents. In cases where the parents are unable to speak English and the children their home language, there is no communication between the parents and the children and misunderstandings result which lead to cross cultural conflict between them.

The lack of positive acknowledgment of the diverse languages and cultures in Australia's multicultural community, places the children in an ambivalent situation when they are trying to form an identity as there are no attempts by the education system to bring the home experiences in the classroom where the children discuss them and understand the value systems of their parents and synthesise them with their school, peer group and community experiences to develop the unique Australian identity and character.

Further, if the cultures and languages are not taught together to the minority children, then they do not become the "carriers" of their parents culture and become alienated from their ethnic communities and at times from the Australian community and they do not belong anywhere. The devaluing of the home and family by the education and dominant culture, undermines the roles of the parents and family in the eyes of children and they come to resent their parents and families, see them as inferior models to emulate, challenge their authority, and conflict results which at times splits the family and the children react with anti-social behaviour and find themselves into trouble.

The Federal government has a National Language Policy, but its implementation depends on the goodwill of each State as the Federal government has no power to enforce it as education is the responsibility of the States. Also the policy concentrates on the learning of English rather than the promotion of community languages. The policy does not mention anything about the language needs of pre-school age children. As a result home language maintenance is not promoted in children's services and children lose their language. Very few resources are directed to language development in both the pre-school and primary school levels. Ethnic children must either attend Saturday Schools or (Ethnic Schools) or obtain private tuition. This places a burden on the child with extra academic responsibilities outside regular school hours and away from their friends and familiar school environment and placing an additional financial strain on the family.

In the case of ATSI children and families, their languages/culture have disappeared as a result of the annexation of their land which was the backbone of their civilization as "terra nullis" and the assimilationist policies which followed the white settlement of their land and destroyed their tribal, family, social, spiritual, cultural, linguistic fabric of their society. However, 40,000 years of civilization does not die easily and they survived in a fragmented way for 206 years. The setting up of a Reconciliation Council and the Native Title Act of 1993, has at last acknowledged that the ATSI and white people need a reconciliation treaty and the rights of Aboriginal people to their sacred and other land claims are recognised and some of these are given back to them. This will help ATSI people to find their identity, their culture and languages, their self determination and be equal citizens of the Australian community.

Some minority religious groups such as the Muslim whose social, family and individual behaviour and lifestyles are dictated by their religious practices and other Eastern religions which have specific needs which are quite different from the Christian faiths have difficulty in having their religious needs acknowledged and services and institutions to be sensitive to these needs and provisions made to accommodate them. For example, dietary needs and preparation of food for some groups, allowing them to conduct prayers and make provisions for them, important celebrations and festival days, customs, dress, death and funerary

practices etc. The awareness of professionals who work with minority children of these factors are important and there is a need for cross cultural training for all professionals such as pre-school, primary and high schools, health professionals, welfare and other people who are involved with ethnic minority children.

Australia has developed some innovative policies to meet the challenges presented by a culturally/linguistically diverse population and has made inroads in many areas, however, the economic rationale is eroding some of the progressive philosophies about our multicultural society and the dismantling of some excellent programs by the government and the community in making provisions for equitable access to resources and services to implement these policies. The Access and Equity Policy, the National Agenda on Multiculturalism, the Social Justice policy, the Anti-Discrimination legislation all state the principles which are relevant to this article and monitoring bodies such as the Office of Multicultural Affairs were established to ensure that these policies were put in place by federal departments. All of them did have three year plans but resources were inadequate to allow for implementation in all areas. Also at times policies were made with inadequate consultation and participation by ethnic communities.

ARTICLE 32

The increase in the number of children who are used by their families especially in outwork and small businesses is of concern. A study on child labour in Australia has shown that some 30,000 young children are employed to assist their parents. Their most exploitative is where the parents are doing outwork and expect the children to help them finish the items. The more they produce, the higher the income. Also children of parents who have small businesses where children are expected to work in the shop at week-ends and night time. There needs to be closer monitoring of labour regulations and some industries such as the Textile, Clothing etc. With the change in industrial laws, the situation will become worse as there will be no protection for these outworkers and their children and families