

Human Rights and Children in the 21st Century UPF Conference, the International Day of Human Rights

Czech Parliament, Prague, The Czech Republic, 14. December 2015



By Juraj Lajda

UPF-Czech Republic commemorated the Day of Human Rights and the 70th anniversary of the UN by organizing an international conference on the theme, “Human Rights and Children in the 21st Century” in the Czech Parliament on the 14th December 2015. High level speakers contributed to the success of the conference. Five of the panellists were members of the Czech Parliament (1 man and 4 ladies). Moreover, there were speakers from Slovakia, Austria, academia and civil

society. The conference was organized under auspices of Nina Nováková, MP by UPF in cooperation with the Civic Forum, European Women’s Union and UN Information Centre in Prague, and was supported by the Topaz foundation.

The conference had two panels: one focused on human rights in general and in the second panel the speakers discussed the application of human rights in protecting family and children in the society. There were around 70 participants in the audience.

In his welcoming speech **Dr. Juraj Lajda**, secretary general of UPF Czech Republic mentioned that this is already the fourth conference in the Czech Parliament focused on family issues organized by UPF in the last one and half years. Many of the regular participants created a feeling of community. He mentioned that discussing the family shows that there is something wrong with the family and we need time and again to speak about that. Even though many people say that the family is the basic unit of society, we could not create many healthy and ideal families in the world until now.

Still there is a long way to go to achieve this goal. The family became too individualistic and especially if we speak about human rights for children there is a tendency is to separate these rights from the family as a unit.

The first panellist was **Dr. Michal Broža**, director of the UN Information Centre in Prague. He mentioned that among the many important days proclaimed by the UN, the Human Rights Day is the most respected one. Since 1950 all nations can remember this day. He mentioned also the 70th anniversary of the founding of the UNO this year. Two years ago we remembered the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the position of the High Commissioner for the Human Rights and since that time the situation improved in many countries concerning the protection of children, **women and tortured people**. **Dr. Broža** reminded us of the four basic principles which were introduced by President Roosevelt: Freedom of speech, religion, liberation from poverty and fear. All these principles are anchored in the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights. In the end he mentioned the UN Agenda 2030 for sustainable development.

Professor Harald Scheu from the Faculty of Law of the Charles University in Prague explained that children are vulnerable and that is why they have a right to be protected. The concept of human rights is derived from the concept of man which was influenced by the Enlightenment. Reason and conscience form the base of the human being. Human rights belong also to those who do not have reason and conscience. They are not individualistic and autonomous rights but it is a right of children to receive protection. This protection is based on the paternalistic principle, i.e. responsibility of the subject, said Prof. Scheu. The protection of **children's** rights cannot do without the paternalism. However, it is necessary to set the limits of this paternalism.

Mr. Peter Zoehrer, director of FOREF Europe and director of UPF Human Rights mentioned that the term "human rights" is a modern one and usually we recall to The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the UN GA in Paris on 10th December 1948. "Universal Human Rights" has become a myth. The reason is, that since 1990 we have a

second set of human rights declaration: the Cairo Declaration on HR in Islam (CDHRI) proclaimed in 1990 and signed by more than 40 nations of the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC). This declaration is based on the sharia law. The lack of awareness by Western politicians about CDHRI has already caused many misunderstandings in negotiating with Islamic countries. Also when speaking about human rights we do not speak so much of the **children's** rights. Yet, children are more vulnerable and the question is how to protect them. The UDHR declares the dignity of individuals and basic rights for freedom of speech, conscience, change of religion. But the most fundamental right is the right for the religious freedom as expressed in the Art. 18. Many call this right as "mother of all rights". **This concept** guarantees the right to change ones religion and also not to force somebody else to accept some religion. Mr. Zoehrer has also outlined four major challenges to protect human rights in our current situation.

The next speaker was **Dr. Martin Dilong**, expert on foreign affairs and human rights in the Christian democratic party in Slovakia who spoke on the topic "Constitutional Protection of Marriage and problems of the persecuted religious **minorities**". There was a novelization of the Slovak Constitution on the 4th June 2014 where "**Marriage is a unique relationship between man and woman**" and Slovak republic protects this, said Dr. Dilong in the beginning of his **speech. The Bible says that "In the beginning God created man and women..." and the Jewish tradition** always protected a woman, he continued. The protection of marriage is not an ideology but it has practical reasons. It is not a matter of one group but of all (not only Christians). The biggest problem is not migration and terrorism but the demographic development. Religious freedom is not a privilege but one of the fundamental freedoms of humans. If we promote religious freedom all other problems can be solved, concluded the speaker.

The last speaker on the first panel was **Marek Benda**, MP. He mentioned, that the "**Candle demonstration**" which took place in autumn of 1988 in Bratislava was an expression of protest against communism. Thanks to this I

am here today, he said. The international human rights are developing. Originally there are 3 basic human rights: right for life, religious right and right of conscience and right of ownership. In the modern history we were fighting against many regimes – Soviet Union, Islamic state, China, Russia. The West has disintegrated because they always invent more human rights and do not concentrate on these 3 basic human rights. As a consequence, the human rights become relative and we are not able to keep the basic and original human rights.

The second panel was opened by **Mrs. Gabriela Pecková**, MP and a medical doctor. She focused on the topic of the new technologies in medicine, especially in genetic engineering. New technologies have surely a great potential to heal many diseases but can be misused. In history we could see that the technological progress not always contributed to the development of people. It is necessary to take into the consideration the ethical and legal aspect of the situation. She spoke on the topic "**Children and their right for privacy**" in connection to the new technologies.

Next speaker was **Mrs. Jitka Chalánková**, MP and medical doctor. "**Family is a much older institution** than the state and that is why the family has right for freedom to educate their children. The state must not determine how to educate the children. The state should protect the family and not to interfere, otherwise family is under the threat of totalitariness. The state can interfere only in special **cases**", said the speaker at the beginning. Unfortunately, in numerous European countries many institutions and self-appointed organizations are misusing their authority. Children became for them a commercial commodity which should be protected, especially against their own biological parents. It is necessary to recognize what is really the best for the child. Mrs. Chalánková is involved in the cause of so called Norwegian children when 2 children were taken away from a Czech mother.

Mrs. Radomíra Keršnerová from the National centre for family spoke about the situation in the families and how to harmonize taking care of the small children while having a profession and a job.

Mrs. Markéta Adamová, MP spoke about the current situation of the immigrants from the viewpoint of protecting the **children's** rights. She visited the detention camp in Czech Republic where she could meet some families of immigrants. In some cases, the children were isolated from their parents because the parents were in process of investigation for crossing the border illegally. Until the situation is solved the children remain separated. She mentioned that the detention camp tries to care for the children well. Nevertheless, the Czech government should be prepared to accept more immigrants.

Mrs. Nina Nováková, MP as the next speaker said that the children should be taught about the human rights from their childhood. Human rights can be applied only in the relationship. The education at schools is very important. According to the Czech law the

education aims at development of human personality including the moral and ethical values. The education is not free from neutrality. Culture is passed on through internalizing to the next generations. We should pass on the culture of European integrity which is based on humanism, Christianity and antics, emphasized the speaker. The immigrant wave is a great challenge for us but we should educate the immigrants about the foundations of our European culture.

The last speaker was **Mrs. Jana Jočová**, director of the Committee for Defence of Parents Rights. In the beginning she put a question: Whom do the Czech children trust most when they have a problem? According to statistical research 56% trusts the parents, 6, 8% the churches and 6, 4 % teachers. Human rights are best realized in the family, she continued. Parents and children rights are

inseparable. Some parents unfortunately resign on the education of their own children. On the other hand there are parents who want to avoid the state system of education (i.e. compulsory vaccination). The state tries to educate children. There are many subjects for children dealing with education – such as education to health, to democracy, media education etc. The state should respond differently and strongly support functional and healthy families in order to prevent the non-functional families.

The conference had a very good response from the audience. The panellists expressed how necessary this kind of event is in order to raise the awareness regarding human rights & family. A few expressed their desire to hold similar events in other cities / countries.