



Opening Speech by HRH the Princess of Hanover

President of AMADE

“Crimes Against Children, Crimes Against Humanity”

An International Forum

27 October 2004

Quezon Ballroom, Shangri-La Hotel, Manila

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

In these trouble times, where human life appears in many instances to be of no account, where the slaughter of peoples can be justified by loftily expressed political and religious creeds, there remains one constant – the universal recognition of all children as treasures to be loved, cared for, and nurtured.

Perhaps it is because children embody our dreams and aspirations of a better world for all and our capacities to achieve them. Children inspire, for those reasons, mankind’s best intentions. It is easy to understand why, as Albert Einstein expressed it, world progress is meaningless so long as there are « unhappy children ».

We are certainly revolted when children are tortured, ill-treated, sold, or compelled be soldiers in war. Atrocities, when done to children, are atrocities like no other. That is why the madness of the recent Russian carnage in Beslan, North Ossetia is an abomination : because this assault specifically targeted children.

My dear friends, there is a line that cannot – it should not – be crossed. The line which encircles children. It is not enough that we try feed them, or heal wounded bodies. Beyond humanitarian relief, the world of nations must stand as one in upholding the rights of our children and in attempting to devise and implement the means of punishing those who dare commit atrocities on children. Such crimes constitute an offense against the whole of humankind.

Terrorism has increasingly been committed against children on different levels. That is a reality openly admitted and openly discussed. And yet there appears to be no corresponding resolutions to draft an international protocol or convention to bind countries in outlawing, and punishing, such terror. There been no protocol or convention dealing with appropriate penal sanctions on an international scale in regard to flagrant violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Rome Statute of the

International Criminal Court, clearly recognizes that « millions of children have been victims of unimaginable atrocities that deeply shock the conscience of humanity ». However, even the Rome Statute fails to provide for the criminalization of offenses committed against children on an international scale, or those committed across international borders.

Most national penal codes have failed to keep pace with the growth of criminality that devastates and victimizes our children. These crimes have now acquired a global complexion, aided by rapid technological advancements that are increasingly being committed on a universal scale. The internet facilitates commercial sexual exploitation, pornography, or the trafficking of children through the easy identification of countries, sites, and children who may be exploited. The elements of the planning and commission of these ghastly crimes as well as the network of perpetrators that make them possible cross national and international borders. Territoriality, as a jurisdictional requirement for the prosecution of criminal offenses under most domestic legislation, has mainly become a barrier in adequately addressing the problem, not only in terms of defining the crimes committed against children, but in deterring and punishing them.

In the end, crimes against children are realities that the world community has to squarely address, and that international law has to combat, whenever and wherever these crimes are committed.

Certainly, there will be tremendous difficulties ahead in forging universal acceptance of the concept of crimes against children as crime against humanity ; even more difficult is the structuring and implementation of a process for bringing violators to justice. There is, even now, an inability to convince the most powerful nations to concede even just an attempt to this. At the core of this reluctance is simple distrust. It is argued, for example, that there are peoples, groups, and nations who would seize upon any international covenant on an international court of justice as a means for political payback, an unacceptable eventuality.

But we cannot allow the difficulties to faze us or to dampen our passion for arriving at acceptable and workable solutions. There will be interminable discussions and compromises along the road. What should never be compromising is the seriousness of intent and persistence in putting an end to the shocking crimes that are committed, with impunity, against our children. What cannot be compromised is the effort to carve out a special type of crimes under international law that will specifically respond to the needs of our children, and a mechanism to appropriately deal with atrocities committed against them.

There may be no universally-accepted solution, or at least there does not yet appear to be one in sight. Acceptance of any solution will, in itself, be a process of evolution. Acceptance will have to be won, little by little – small movements of progress that will, it is hoped, eventually spell significant changes in international law.

The continuing challenge is to try. What is at stake, after all, is the opportunity to make the world a better place for our children, and all others, to live in. Let us not ignore, or squander, the opportunity.

This is AMADE's job. As long as there are children who suffer or are in danger, AMADE will be there – and fighting.

Thank you