



18th January 2018

To: Imma Guerras-Delgado, Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights at the UN (OHCHR)
Professor Anthony Costello, Head of the Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health at the World Health Organization (WHO)
Dr. Marcus M. Stahlhofer, Technical Officer, Child Rights and Child Health & Regulation of Marketing of Foods for Infants and Young Children

Dear Imma, Anthony and Marcus,

Many thanks for sending through the “Final report. November 2017” relating to our expert meeting last June and now giving us the opportunity to respond to it

On examining this document, I was unclear as to how it had been constructed and how it related to the extremely valuable contributions made by the attending experts at the actual meeting.

On page 7 of this large 39-page document is written the following: *“The purpose of this report is to provide examples of how a human rights based approach to addressing mortality and morbidity among children under 5 has been approached to date. This provided a grounding for discussion at the expert consultation by ensuring that participants were aware of the range of approaches that exist to applying a human rights based approach in this context.”*

However, the report (not made available in advance of the meeting) contains a mixture of a detailed analysis of data submitted in advance by many of the participants and short summaries of the presentations, not by the participants, but by senior members of OHCHR. Despite searching through the report, I could not find summaries of the many vital messages concerning the effects of human rights abuses that originated from powerful presentations and extremely strong and valuable action points proposed by the attending experts.

For example, I was one of three experts giving presentations on the appalling effects of armed conflict on the health and healthcare of women, babies and children. However, a search through the whole document failed to reveal the word Syria, this despite a heart rending account of the devastating effects of conflict in Syria on the healthcare of women and children given by a Syrian doctor who had personally witnessed terrible abuses.

In terms of existing world literature on human rights and young children the following was written on page 6: *“Searches were carried out of the peer-reviewed literature as well as grey literature available on line but yielded very little relevant information.”*

As none of the details of the methodology of this search and the key search words used are given, I am unclear as to the reasons and rationale of this finding. A simple Google scholar search renders several relevant articles. And, purely as examples relating to our own work, there was no mention of the publication in 1991 in the world's highest ranking peer-reviewed journal "Pediatrics" of the Child Friendly Healthcare Initiative (Pediatrics 2000;106;1054-1064)

or in 1998 in "Pediatrics" of an article on the the healthcare of children in hospitals in Afghanistan (1998:102;1193-1198), a situation that has hardly changed since then. I could provide, if it would be helpful, large numbers of highly relevant peer-reviewed articles on the effects of the life threatening abuse of infants and young children in their homes and similar publications on the consequences of armed conflict on the healthcare and abuse of babies, young children and their mothers.

Another example, published in the peer-reviewed journal "Archives of Disease in Childhood" described a proposal to establish a new UN convention aimed at addressing the human rights of pregnant women and the newborn infant. This was discussed at length in the meeting, is now being examined by UNICEF in New York but there is inexplicably no reference made to it in the report.

The participants of this conference are world leaders on human rights and children and each of them raised highly significant recommendations and action points during the meeting. These were documented at the time but so far not included in this report, which is extremely disappointing. Such recommendations included the very important need to integrate maternity and newborn baby healthcare, which was discussed on a number of occasions.

In the armed conflict section, I raised the devastating consequences of the arms trade and armed conflict which deliberately targets hospitals and clinics and health workers. The only reference to this in this existing final report without a summary of the evidence upon which this is based states:

On page 34:

"Pursue a UN internal protection system that overcomes the veto problem regarding health in conflict."

"Convince the UN about the necessity of safe schools, orphanages and hospitals to protect both children and medical staff."

During the meeting, the need for a complete overhaul of the UN Security Council was put forward and strongly supported. Meanwhile in Myanmar, the international community has observed that live babies are being thrown into fires and children set fire to in their own homes. The Safeguarding Health in Conflict movement did not receive a mention. The statements of page 34 need far more prominence in this report supported by overwhelming data that are available with, I would suggest, not the soft word "convince" but "mandate" being used.

In order to produce a meaningful report that inspires urgent action, I urge all of the participants to insist on their messages being reported and highlighted as a matter of urgency in a re-worked report to the Human Rights Council. The situation regarding the consequences of the continuing, if not worsening, human rights abuses on women and children warrants a complete rewriting of this report by all participants with a summary statement that, hopefully, leads to the UN taking a far more meaningful approach to the global occurring gross human rights abuses as discussed in this vital meeting. We do not want this report to end up on a shelf or a computer file unread and un-noticed. The babies, children and women of the world are relying on us to be their voice and speak up about the egregious abuses they face while taking forward all possible solutions.

I am ready and willing to further contribute evidence based material and encourage others to do the same in the expectation that our comments will be included and reflected in the reworked report. I will send my detailed comments by the deadline.

Yours sincerely,

David Southall

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