

Anne Grandjean, UNICEF

Mrs Anne Grandjean, thank you for accepting this interview, may I ask you to introduce yourself ?

My name is Anne Grandjean and I am focal point for Justice for Children Issues in UNICEF in New York, where I deal many with support to UNICEF country offices and to policy design in Justice for Children matters.

Please tell us about you experience in Palestine with children victims and witnesses?

One of the key projects that we had in Palestine when I was working there for UNICEF, was a partnership with international NGO Defence for Children, and particularly with its Palestinian section, where we established five socially guided centres in different areas of the Palestinian territories. These centres hosted lawyers and social workers, that every child victim and witness (and his or her family together with him or her) could go and see at any time and ask advice from. Then the lawyer would if needed help the children to resort to the court if this was relevant, or otherwise refer the children and families to other services. So these centres were very key in helping the children to obtain redress for violation of their rights if that was needed, and also they would shift in a more emergency mode when the area was under closure or when there were military operations. They would reinforce their teams in terms of psychosocial workers, and organise psychosocial sessions. So, that was a very flexible model, that was as efficient in “normal” times as in emergency times.

What is your professional point of view on article 12 CRC : participation and right of the child to express his or her own views?

I would say that article 12 is at the same time one of the most revolutionary articles of the Convention, and one of the most difficult to implement, of the most challenging. Revolutionary, because, somehow, it is at the heart of the concept of children’s rights. And at the heart of the shift from looking at the child as an object of adult goodwill, to an subject of his or her own rights. Now, to establish that the child has his/her opinion, and that adults have the obligation to listen to this opinion and to take it seriously. And on the other hand, it is challenging because it requires us as adults to question ourselves and to adapt our ways to interact with children. For example, looking at the topic of today during this Seminar : the rights of children in the Justice process, it requires the court and the police to adapt their procedures and their environment, so that children are enabled to voice their opinion. It would for example require the judges to wear less intimidating robes, to sit at the same level as the child, or to avoid that the child be confronted directly to the adult. All these kind of special procedures so that the child can express himself or herself properly.

You have been launching the “Justice for Children Approach”. Can you tell us more about it?

It is a very new UN approach that has been issued by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in September this year 2008. The main purpose is to better serve and protect children in Justice processes, children as victims, as witnesses, as alleged offenders, or for any other reason that a child might have to be in front of the Justice. The rationale behind this approach is that there will be no peace and no security if children are not taken into account into rule of law initiatives. If we don’t tackle the issue of violence against children, trafficking,

demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers, children in conflict with the law, etc., there will be no peace and no security. Children are also the most affected in times of conflict, and approximately, they make up half of humanity. Despite these facts, they were so far very much neglected from all the rule of law initiatives. That is why this approach was needed to redress that, and through this new approach, the UN agencies are committed to join forces and to include children in any rule of law initiative.

We have dealt with the legal and procedural issues during this Seminar :Is society as a whole able to make a change for children Victims and Witnesses, any more than in prevention?

Well, so far, approximately halfway of the Seminar, we indeed focussed very much on the procedure aspect and the legal framework. That is very important and this framework is absolutely necessary. But that is also not sufficient. Another element that is absolutely crucial is the legal environment of populations : somehow creating a demand within the population, and including children, including the more vulnerable, those that are usually excluded, so that they, first, know about their rights, and second, are supported and enabled to claim for these rights and to obtain redress when these rights have been violated. That is the issue of access to Justice and as I said legal empowerment. This whole aspect is very crucial and very necessary, as well. To intervene in this area, civil society can play a very active role, often much more than the government, since they have direct access to the population and are less intimidating to them. They are key to increase this legal empowerment of vulnerable populations.