from Phyllis Schlafly

December 31, 1992

U.N. Treaty Would Pit Child Against Parents

The Children's Defense Fund, the chief vehicle for those who want government to take over the raising of children, has a new goal under the Clinton Administration. Having failed to get Congress to pass the costly ABC daycare bill, the Fund is now focusing on getting the Senate to ratify a U.N. treaty so that child-advocacy lawyers can assert children's “rights” against their parents.

The proposed United Nations Convention (Treaty) on the Rights of the Child is based on the concept that a child's rights originate with the U.N. Treaty itself or with the government, in contrast to the American theory that individuals have inalienable rights which the government may not take away. U.N. treaties, courts, and bureaucracies do not respect our American philosophy of individual rights, and it would badly diminish our liberty to submit ourselves to a U.N. document interpreted by foreign lawyers.

The Treaty purports to give the child the right to express his own views freely in all matters, to receive information of all kinds through “media of the child’s choice,” to freedom of religion, to be protected from interference with his correspondence, to have access to information from national and international sources in the media, to use his own language, and to have the right to “rest and leisure.”

These are just a few of the literally dozens of brand new “rights of the child” scattered throughout the 54 Articles of the U.N. Treaty, which is longer than the entire U.S. Constitution.

Despite a vague reference to undefined “rights and duties of parents,” the Treaty does not recognize any specific right of parents to make decisions for their minor children.

Do we really want to give every child the legal right to say anything he wants to his parents at the dinner table? To watch television (“access to the media”) instead of doing homework? To Join a cult instead of attending his parents' church? To reject household chores because they interfere with his U.N. right to “rest and leisure”?

Unlike our U.S. Constitution, which only mentions rights that can be enforced against the government, the U.N. Treaty declares “rights of the child” against parents, the family, private institutions, and society as whole. Since the Treaty is a legal document which if ratified would become part of the “supreme law of the land,” we can expect ACLU lawyers to bring a series of test cases to see how far the courts will extend its provisions.

What will it mean to enforce the provision that makes “primary education compulsory and available free to all”? Will this ambiguous provision require us to give public subsidies to private and religious schools, OR could it be interpreted to ban them altogether?

Current U.S. law prohibits our own Federal Government from prescribing curriculum for local schools, but the U.N. Treaty prescribes curriculum with awesome specificity. It calls for teaching children “the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations,” respect for “the national values of civilizations different from his or her own,” and “the development of respect for the natural environment.”

The U.N. Treaty imposes on the government the obligation to “strive to ensure,” to “render appropriate assistance,” and to “take all appropriate measures,” to the “maximum extent of their available resources” so that children may enjoy certain economic benefits, such as an “adequate standard of living.” Since these provisions cannot be implemented without money, will the treaty require our government to impose new taxes to carry out these obligations?

The U.N. Treaty requires us to “ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.” The Treaty even obligates the government to ensure “standards” for child care institutions, services and facilities.

What does the U.N. Treaty mean when it requires universal 1egal standards for the care and protection of children against neglect, exploitation, and abuse? Will the United Nations decide that it is “neglect” NOT to establish government daycare centers, OR that it is “neglect” to put children in daycare centers where they are exposed to more illnesses?

The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the child is vague and contradictory on the fundamental issue of whether or not an unborn child is accorded any rights. The abortion issue should not be further complicated by putting the U.N. bureaucracy and international courts into the decision-making process.

Of course, all these grandiose U.N. Treaty goals would not be complete without the establishment of a new international bureaucracy and mechanism of control headed by a committee of ten “experts.” There is no assurance that any American will be on this committee of experts, nor that there will be even one “expert” friendly to American institutions and traditions.

The U.N. Treaty on the Rights of the child is a bad deal for Americans on every count.