



Op-Ed article

By Poul Brandrup, country director Save the Children Sweden-Norway, Afghanistan Programme.

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When you travel in Afghanistan you cannot avoid meeting many small children, often in worn and torn clothes and living under poor conditions. Afghanistan still has a very high reproduction rate and over half the population is 17 years or younger.

Children from seven – eight years of age most often are seen carrying loads, helping out in market stalls or around rural homes. And from 10-11 years of age you rarely see any girls, except those in groups going to and from schools.

These observations reflect the harsh reality of children in Afghanistan. Deep poverty, lack of opportunities and social and cultural norms that restrict in particular girls' possibilities, but also those of ethnic minorities and those with disabilities.

The need to work for children's rights is obvious. Save the Children in Afghanistan works to further children's rights in all aspects. So does UNICEF and several NGOs and there is good cooperation between all and with key government entities.

The international bench mark is the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Afghanistan ratified in 1994. Save the Children has successfully initiated work by respected scholars of Islam to identify the rights of children in Islam. The rights of the child as defined in the International Convention are with few exceptions all reflected in Islam.

The fact remains that there is far too little attention to the plight of children in Afghanistan and that their situation is amongst the worst in the world. Recent reports from the Government and an alternative from civil society document that there still is a lot to do. Social exclusion of children with disabilities, child marriages, cruel treatment and punishment of children also in schools, lack of access to education and lack of quality education, child labour and the profound effects of the armed conflict on children remain the reality in Afghanistan.

It is important that the international community with the Afghan government and organisations such as Save the Children intensifies its efforts to support improvements in the lives of Afghan children. The review by the United Nations Human Rights Council of the situation of children in Afghanistan offers a key opportunity for all to strengthen the work for their rights. Save the Children will work tirelessly to meet that challenge.

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