

## *Juvenile Justice Initiative*

For Immediate Release  
April 16, 2007

For more information, contact:  
Mary Reynolds at 217-522-7970

### **Washington D.C. Briefing to Stress the Rights of Children International Expert to Provide An Overview of the Key Principles and Articles of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Jaap Doek, Law Professor at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam and Chairperson of the United Nation’s Committee on the Rights of the Child from 2001-2006, is scheduled to provide a briefing on the principles of the Convention as they relate to children in conflict with the law. The briefing will take place from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. on Monday, April 16, 2007 in room 485 of the Russell Office Building. Various Congressional staffers and national youth advocates have been invited to attend the briefing.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was undertaken as part of the celebration of the 1979 United Nations International Year of the Child. Over a 10-year drafting period, the CRC developed into a comprehensive human rights treaty for children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights -- civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. In 1990, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child took effect. In 2002, the United States ratified the optional protocols to the Convention, but the United States remains one of only two countries – Somalia is the other – that has not ratified the Convention.

The CRC includes specific provisions for the treatment of youth in conflict with the law. Several juvenile justice provisions are included such as a prohibition on the death penalty and life without parole for juveniles, using confinement only as a last resort, and treating youth with humanity and respect.

Professor Doek will explain how ratification could strengthen efforts to improve the welfare of children in the United States. Mark Soler, Executive Director of the Center for Children’s Law and Policy, will address the relevance of the CRC to issues concerning the treatment of children in juvenile justice institutional settings. Randolph Stone, Professor of Law at the University of Chicago will present information on the over-representation of children of color in the juvenile justice system and how the CRC would help us better address their needs and reduce their presence in that system. Shay Bilchik, Director of Georgetown University’s Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and Systems Integration, will moderate the briefing.

The CRC is being used throughout the United States as a model for basic human rights and for juvenile justice reform efforts. For example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child considers all youth under the age of 18 to be children. In Illinois, legislation is under consideration that would raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction from 17 to 18 to make

Illinois laws conform with the CRC. Currently, 37 other states, the District of Columbia, and the federal government use the 18th birthday as the age of adult criminal jurisdiction, and international law sets 18 as the age of majority for criminal prosecution. Connecticut and Wisconsin are also considering similar legislation.

In abolishing the death penalty for youth under the age of 18, the Supreme Court in *Roper v. Simmons* cited the Convention on the Rights of the Child even though it had not been ratified by the United States. The Court prominently referenced the CRC, noting “Article 37 of the [CRC], which every country in the world has ratified save for the United States and Somalia, contains an express prohibition on capital punishment for crimes committed by juveniles under 18. Parallel prohibitions are contained in other significant international covenants.”

The National Juvenile Justice Network, the Campaign for the U.S. Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Georgetown University’s Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, the Juvenile Justice Initiative of Illinois, and the Children and Family Justice Center at Northwestern University School of Law all support the Convention and assisted in the organization of this briefing.

###

413 West Monroe  
Springfield, Illinois 62704  
Telephone: 217-522-7970  
Fax: 217-522-7980  
[www.jjustice.org](http://www.jjustice.org)