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FIRST UNITED NATIONS CONGRESS ON THE PREVENTION OF  
CRIME AND THE TREATMENT OF OFFENDERS

Geneva, 22 August - 3 September, 1955

Plenary meeting

## PREVENTION OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Recommendations adopted by Section III

## I. SCOPE AND PROCEDURES

The summary of Scope and Procedures and of Conclusions and Recommendations presented below is drawn from the following sources:

- (1) The Report by the Secretariat on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency and from papers submitted by the specialized agencies;
- (2) Certain mandates from the Steering Committee of the Congress;
- (3) Oral and written statements submitted by participants including Non-Governmental Organizations to the Congress;  
and
- (4) The work of the Ad hoc Drafting Committee charged with preparing Conclusions, presided over by the Chairman of the Section\*.

Section III devoted initially a considerable effort to arrive at a universally applicable definition of juvenile delinquency for the purposes of the work of the Congress. Delegates from several countries emphasized, as did the Report by the Secretariat, the importance of defining delinquency precisely and in legal terms, so

\* Under the chairmanship of Mr. John Ross, C.B., this Committee included Mlle. S. Huynen (Belgium), Mr. Justice John Vincent Barry (Australia), Mr. D. V. Kulkarni (India), Mr. I. Drapkin (Chile), Dr. D. Buckel (WHO), and Mr. P. W. Tappan, Rapporteur (USA).

that children should not unnecessarily be considered delinquent where their conduct had not been defined as a criminal offence by the law of their country. It was concluded, however, that, because of wide variations in custom, law and philosophy in different countries, it was not feasible to formulate a limited and universal definition of the term.

Accordingly,

a proposal relating to the scope of the matters to be considered was adopted by the Section, this to replace items (1), (2) and (3) of "General principles with regard to the prevention of juvenile delinquency" (A/CONF.6/C.3/L.3):

"The subject for study is the situation of minors in whose interests society should promote measures designed to ensure, as far as possible, that they are enabled to live a law-abiding, well-adjusted and useful life.

"The discussion and study of the Congress should include not only those juveniles who have committed an act regarded as a criminal offence by the law of their country, but also those whose social situation or whose character places them in danger of committing such an act, or who are in need of care and protection.

"Preventive work should cover all three categories."

It was concluded that the attention of the Section should be directed primarily to pre-delinquency: the prevention of juvenile delinquency where no prior law violation had occurred. Further, it was proposed by the Chairman of the Section, and agreed by the delegates, that instead of proceeding on the basis of the Guiding Principles contained in document A/CONF.6/C.3/L.3, participants, taking account of what was being done towards prevention in their own countries, should consider how preventive work might be developed in relation to: (1) the community; (2) the family and school; (3) the social services; and (4) other agencies. It was recognized that there was overlapping within this classification; certain types of measures, for example, governmental and clinical services, might be employed in two or more of the classes.

It was observed that in the prevention of delinquency distinction should be made between those underlying, often highly significant, influences that were indirect in their relation to delinquency, and the more direct influences that might incur or discourage anti-social behaviour. Basic trends of culture in some societies might so promote delinquency as to make it extremely difficult to deal with the situation effectively by the more direct but partial measures of prevention that might be established.

## II. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. The Community

The Congress recognizes that the community, considered in its local, regional and national aspects, provides the environment in which social institutions mould the child's behaviour patterns and personality. The neighbourhood in which young people live and form their most important associations is perhaps the most fundamental phase of community influence, though it reflects too the broader influences of the society and culture. The factors which shape character derive very largely from these community influences as they operate through the family, the school, religious and other social institutions. Community action to prevent juvenile delinquency is to a great extent a matter of organizing the variety of community resources so as to provide, on the one hand, an environment in which children may develop without abnormalities of character and, on the other, where those who are in danger of becoming delinquent may be discovered and guided toward conformity to normal standards. Toward these ends, the following conclusions and recommendations are submitted:

1. Services, both official and unofficial, for young people in the community should be organized and drawn together as closely as possible to provide them a healthy environment for growth and appropriate measures of guidance and control when they are in difficulty. These should include constructive activities in the family, school and other social institutions to meet the fundamental needs of youth and, so far as possible, varied agency resources, such as child guidance clinics, educational centres and counselling facilities for parents, leisure time resources, family substitutes, special schools or classes and organizations designed to encourage the mutual aid of youth and others. Consideration should be given to the possible establishment of community committees, co-ordinating councils, or some other sort of specialized agency to plan, organize and develop community resources for the aid of children with problems and their families.
2. Within the social framework of the country involved, appropriate machinery, whether official or unofficial, should be established to advise in the formulation of policies and to supervise their application for the prevention of delinquency.
3. In the development of programmes and policies, due attention should be given to the developments in other countries, with a view to the possible selective adaptation of those features that may be used effectively. In this regard it is desirable especially that the more positive elements of the programmes of other

societies be selected and that a country should avoid the adoption of measures that are inappropriate either intrinsically or because of cultural differences.

4. In the effort to prevent delinquency, special attention should be focussed upon those "delinquency areas" where there is a large component of anti-social attitudes and behaviour. Where such "delinquency areas" exist, it is desirable to strengthen the work of prevention as well as treatment.

5. Policies and programmes of general social welfare are not enough, by themselves alone, to dispense with the need for more specific policies that focus attention on juvenile delinquency and its prevention.

#### B. The Family and School

##### The Family

It is axiomatic that ordinarily the family provides the most important phase of the child's environment from his earliest years and that it plays a fundamental role in the development of personality, attitudes and behaviour. It is recognized, furthermore, that industrialization and the growth of cities have been accompanied by an increasing measure of social, family and personal disorganization. Delinquency appears to have had an intimate relationship with the social and cultural changes that have operated through the family. It is vital therefore that preventive efforts be designed to produce closer family ties, thus achieving greater affection, emotional security and control through the family. The child needs a sense of belonging. The following conclusions and recommendations are submitted.

1. So far as possible, assistance should be provided to parents where necessary in order that their basic material needs may be met. In particular it is desirable that some form of family or children's allowances be given where necessary to keep the family intact, to avoid the necessity for mothers' working outside the home for economic reasons alone and to protect children where the family is broken or where the mother must work.

2. Information, guidance, and counselling services should be provided for parents and for their children in order that they may not get into difficulty through lack of knowledge. Adult and family-life education are desirable for this purpose.

3. Counselling in domestic relations, conciliation machinery for estranged parents and psychological assistance of other sorts for parents should be made available, so far as possible, so that individuals with family difficulties may be helped to resolve their problems.

4. Emphasis should be placed upon fulfilling children's emotional and social needs and remedying their difficulties insofar as it is feasible through the family rather than through the direct intervention of other agencies or removal from home. Parents may require help in the care or guidance of those children who manifest serious difficulties, but children should not be compulsorily removed from the care of their parents except by order of a court or board containing a judicial element, after hearing and determining the case according to law and in the interests of the welfare of the child.
5. Use should be made of foster homes or boarding homes where appropriate, where efforts with the child and/or his parents have failed so seriously that placement is necessary in the interest of his care and protection.
6. Children ought not to be placed in institutions designed specifically for delinquent children unless they have violated the law and all efforts at supervision in their own homes fail. Placement in institutions for neglected or dependent children should be resorted to only when they cannot be cared for in their own homes and when other types of home placement are impossible. Other types of specialized treatment facilities may be employed in appropriate cases, however, to provide particular forms of therapy that cannot be applied effectively in the community. In such cases the rights and interests of both the child and his parents should be given careful consideration.
7. In those societies that are recently becoming industrialized but where the family is still a well-integrated and effective unit of control, serious effort should be directed to maintaining its cohesiveness in order to mitigate so far as possible; the disorganizing consequences of industrialization.
8. Housing programmes should be developed to provide better living conditions. Urban housing projects should be so organized as to provide for full community living in the area of residence. Where there is an heterogeneous mixture of peoples living together, agency facilities should be provided to facilitate the interrelationships of those whose cultures are different.

#### The School

Other than the family, the school is the social institution in closest and most frequent contact with the child from his early years into adolescence. It broadens his associations beyond the family and begins his life in the community. It plays an important role not only in his intellectual development but in his emotional and social growth as well. Very commonly children's

behavioural difficulties are associated with poor adjustments in school. Educational institutions are very important, therefore, both in their possible contribution to the healthy social development of children and in the opportunity they provide for teachers to identify in a preliminary way those who appear to display serious adjustment problems that require further investigation. It is not believed, however, that the school should attempt to assume specialized functions which properly belong to the family, religious institutions, the court, or specialized social agencies.

9. The school should take into account as fully as possible the individual differences in aptitude, and in personality generally among children so as to fit the educational programme of their diverse requirements. Flexible curricula are needed for this purpose.

10. Within the limitations of its ability to do so, the school should endeavour to play a constructive role in the development of character and attitudes among children, with the objective of counteracting other unhealthy influences in the community.

11. The training of teachers should include sound preparation for understanding children and for identifying those with emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers should be of a type with which children can properly identify in the development of character and goals of living.

12. The educational programme should emphasize the contact and co-operation of school and family so that children's difficulties of adjustment may be avoided or alleviated. Parent-teacher and home-school or other similar associations are desirable for this purpose.

13. Auxiliary psychological and social services attached to the school should be developed so far as possible to help children and to aid and advise parents and teachers. Guidance clinics and psychological testing and treatment facilities are desirable for these purposes.

14. Greater emphasis should be laid upon educational measures, including vocational guidance, designed to meet better the emotional and social difficulties of adolescents who are completing school and to facilitate their entry into working life, and to measures intended to improve the condition of children and youth who are already at work.

15. It is important in the interests of preventing delinquency that the community should prevent the exploitation of children for economic reasons at the sacrifice

of their education, their healthy development and their future.

C. Social Services, Including Health Services

With the development of complexity and conflict of patterns in the modern community, the ordinary social institutions, such as the family, school, and church, have encountered increasing difficulty in the effective performance of their functions. In particular, they have had limited success in maintaining stability, integrity, a sense of independence and responsibility of the individual. This has been associated with an increasing prevalence of delinquency as well as other forms of emotional and social disorders such as psychoneurosis, psychosis, alcoholism, suicide, family breakdown, unemployment. Because of the inability of the primary social institutions to cope with these problems, specialized social agencies have been called upon more and more to intervene. Thus have come to be established what have been referred to above as the "direct" services, not only for the prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency, but also of other difficulties which may, but in a majority of cases do not, produce delinquency. The fuller effectiveness in the performance of these services should lead, it is believed, to the diminution both of juvenile delinquency and of the other disorders. However, it should be observed that some caution is desirable in the method and extent of providing such services: the individual should be encouraged to retain a sense of personal responsibility to avoid passive dependence. He should be aided to cope with his frustrations and other difficulties rather than led to expect their removal. In accordance with these principles, the following conclusions and recommendations are submitted:

1. So far as may be necessary and feasible, a full net-work of social and health services should be provided by official and unofficial agencies in order that children who are in danger of becoming delinquent or who are in need of care and protection may be provided the treatment they require. These services include, in particular, welfare agencies, psychiatric clinics, family service agencies, child guidance clinics, centres for observation and testing and other specialized child welfare facilities.
2. It is possible, in many countries, to build on existing services, expanding treatment and control services to include preventive services. This would imply a fundamental reorientation both in theory and practice of such services.
3. The integration and co-ordination of the varied social services is most desirable to avoid both the overlapping or duplication of facilities and gaps

where coverage is needed. Furthermore, by the establishment of co-ordinating councils or referral committees, it will be possible to discover a greater proportion of those children who manifest serious difficulties in adjustment.

4. Referral of cases needing help, guidance or control may be made most effectively by those agencies that have closest contact with children in troubles: the schools, clinics, social agencies, police, courts, churches, in addition to parents. The discovery of children with adjustment problems is not, however, a diagnosis of delinquency or pre-delinquency, but a basis for referral for diagnostic purposes, where necessary, in order to ascertain what the specialized nature of the problem may be. Thus, through the co-ordinating agency and the use of diagnostic facilities, it is possible to refer cases to the treatment resource best suited to the needs of the individual child and his family. The result is not only advantageous to the client but economical in the use of specialized treatment facilities.

5. Where clinical work with the child or his family is involved, whether diagnostic or therapeutic, advanced training of professional staff is required. Because of the special problems involved in dealing with delinquency prevention and juvenile delinquency itself, a specialized (and, in many places, revised) training is required for authorities who handle such cases: psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, probation officers, specialized school teachers and others.

6. There is a need to strengthen the collaboration between the professional experts who deal in delinquency prevention as well as to co-ordinate efforts of the preventive agencies.

7. Specialized facilities are needed for particular types of problems in some countries where provisions are not presently in existence: for unmarried mothers, for adolescents who are in difficult transition to adulthood, for children with special disabilities and disorders, and others.

8. The establishment of agencies independently of State action should be encouraged, providing that the services they supply are technically competent and that they can form part of a general co-ordinated plan covering the totality of social and health services concerned with the prevention of juvenile delinquency.

9. Accurate knowledge of the fields of delinquency prevention and treatment lags far behind the good intentions of those interested in increasing social action, and so there is need for caution in determining the social action to be taken.



It is desirable to make provision for evaluation whenever new social action is undertaken.

D. Other Agencies

The prevention of delinquency is ordinarily considered to be primarily the concern and responsibility of the agencies and institutions considered in the comments and conclusions above. Certain other agencies, however, may play a part in this field in some countries. These include, among others, religious bodies, organizations which provide leisure time facilities, police, youth and industrial organizations. There is little agreement among authorities either as to the specific measures that they may appropriately employ or as to the consequences which may result from their use. It is clear that considerable research is required to determine what is presently being done by such agencies and, more particularly, the direct and indirect effects of their operations.

Each class of agencies referred to here, because of the general nature of its functions, is in a peculiarly effective position to discover those children who display social or emotional problems, and to make referrals to more specialized agencies for diagnosis and treatment. Such practice is recommended as highly desirable.

The appraisal of the more direct efforts of these agencies towards the prevention of juvenile delinquency can be only tentative, and this should be borne in mind in considering the following conclusions:

1. Religious bodies may play an increasing role not only in the establishment and perpetuation of firm moral standards in the home and community but also in developing youths' and parents' services that may help to counteract the disorganizing influences of rapid social change and materialism. While the role of religion differs in the several countries, it is recognized that religious bodies have an important part to play in the prevention of juvenile delinquency.
2. The fundamental mission of the police is to ensure the protection of property and persons and the prevention of delinquency, particularly of minors, is normally one of its duties. From the nature of their function, police officers are in permanent contact with all classes of society. Being thus well placed to detect dangerous conditions and criminogenic factors, it is for them to take steps within their competence and also to alert the judicial authorities, the social, health

and other qualified services. In the general organization of the police, the institution of special police services for juveniles should be officially encouraged. These special services should be composed of specially trained police officers.

3. Without regard to specific effects upon the prevention of delinquency, it is desirable that a wide variety of constructive leisure time activities should be made available to children and youth in the interest of their general healthy development. With the increasing margin of leisure time available in some countries, education and training for the wise use of leisure time becomes increasingly important. Clubs, associations, sports, and other forms of organized recreation should be available, but no single plan of leisure-time pursuit should be considered appropriate or adequate to the individual needs of every youth.

4. More may be gained by a positive emphasis upon the development of constructive and diversified activities, including the mass media of communication (e.g. cinema, radio, television, comic books and other publications), than upon rigid and negative measures of control and censorship.

5. Efforts should be made to integrate the activities of the agencies noted in this section, and others that might be mentioned, more closely into the services and objectives of the other agencies and social institutions that have been considered in relation to the prevention of delinquency.

#### E. Research

More important, perhaps, than any of the specific conclusions and recommendations submitted above is the obvious need for the development of more research relating to delinquency causation, prediction and prevention. Efforts to prevent juvenile delinquency should become more effective and economical as more accurate knowledge is available. Research should be directed both to the identification of the measures that are currently employed in the effort to prevent juvenile delinquency and to objective and critical evaluation of the effectiveness of such measures. Comparative, co-ordinated and interdisciplinary researches should be carried out to determine the relative effects of programmes in different countries. Research should also be devoted to the causation, diagnosis and treatment of delinquency. The United Nations is urged to continue its support of significant researches in these fields.

The Congress wishes to go on record in praise of the programme adopted by the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies disclosed in the valuable and comprehensive study prepared by the Secretariat of the United Nations in the Report on The Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (Document ST/SCA/Ser.M/7-8).

This archiving project is a collaborative effort between United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and American Society of Criminology, Division of International Criminology. Any comments or questions should be directed to Cindy J. Smith at [CJSmithphd@comcast.net](mailto:CJSmithphd@comcast.net) or Emil Wandzilak at [emil.wandzilak@unodc.org](mailto:emil.wandzilak@unodc.org).