



DECLARATION from the Virtual OMEP World Assembly on November 28, 2020

THE ROLE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION DURING THE PANDEMIC

We, members of the World Executive Committee of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP), presidents and delegates of the National Committees present at the 72nd Virtual World Assembly call on State parties, in this global pandemic times, to consider children's specific rights, stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), regarding education, care, health, economy, and social support, and always to give priority to the best interests of the child.

The early years are of vital importance and State parties need to take special measures to protect children to promote the wellbeing respecting the best interests of the child, following the ratification of the UNCRC. In this time dominated by the global pandemic, there are additional risks for young children. The pandemic is not only a virus, but also a huge human crisis and it is verified that children living in conditions of poverty, extreme poverty and inequality have worsened their situation. There are also indirect consequences that deeply affect children's lives and development, such as family deaths, fear, confinement, hunger, physical estrangement, increased violence and abuse, lack of moments for play and movement, and excessive exposure to screens.

State parties are guarantors of the fulfilment of the CRC and have the duty to implement children's rights. Children need a State, a family, holistic education and a civil society determined to promote and protect their dignity and rights. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) plays a fundamental role in this support.

OMEP wants to highlight the importance of (re)opening early childhood institutions, as the conditions are declared safe and guaranteeing continuity of ECEC, through creative and wide proposals, strategies and materials, taking into account the need for play and movement and that young children should not be exposed for long hours to screens.

OMEP also wants to stress that due to the characteristics of the early years and the importance of relationships, gestures, hugs, physical contact, body language and facial expression are necessary parts of the ECE pedagogy.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown how connected we are worldwide, and also how urgent it is for us together to join efforts towards building a sustainable world. We must focus our responsibility on the present and future lives of our children, and this requires rebuilding a society we want. There is a possibility of creating a better world, but it needs collective and solidarity efforts based on the lessons learned from this crisis.

The corona crisis can be seen as a health crisis, climate crisis and as an environmental crisis. However they are all linked and proof of an existential crisis for our whole civilization. The strong actions taken to stop COVID-19 show that change is possible.

OMEP focuses on creating a sustainable world, in the best interests of the child, for humanity and for the planet. We will continue with urgency, to work in solidarity to defend and maintain the progress made towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and SDG 4, convinced that education is the main tool for building a better world for all, leaving no one behind.