

Council Supports Children's Rights

By Jonathan Friedman
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May 12, 2010 -- The City of Santa Monica dabbled in international politics on Tuesday evening when it voted 5-0 to support the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The international treaty was adopted in 1989 and went into effect in 1990. It has been ratified by 193 nations, including all the members of the United Nations except for the United States and Somalia.

The CRC established a set of rights for children throughout the world. An 18-member panel that meets in Geneva, Switzerland is charged with deciding whether nations signed to the treaty are complying with it.

While proponents of the treaty say it protects children's rights, opponents in the United States say it could interfere with parents' rights to raise their children as they please. There are also concerns about its compliance with U.S. laws on criminal punishment. Additionally, critics say it is mostly a symbolic gesture, noting that many of the signatory nations are involved in human rights violations, including those against children.

The United States helped draft the document in 1989 and then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright signed it in 1995. It has never been sent to the Senate for ratification.

"I think the Convention is very consistent with positions we have taken here in Santa Monica relating to other issues of national concern and encouraging

our state and federal governments to weigh in on these issues, which reflect the values of the community," said Council member Gleam Davis, who placed the item on the Council agenda.

Council member Kevin McKeown said, "Well, I'm certainly happy to add to the list of signatory nations, the People's Republic of Santa Monica." He added that the Council should encourage California's senators to raise the issue to their colleagues.

Sen. Barbara Boxer last year briefly campaigned to get the Senate to ratify the treaty. President Barack Obama said during his presidential campaign that he would like the United States to do it.

Several students spoke during the Council meeting, encouraging the passage of the resolution. They represented Human Rights Watch's Student Task Force of Los Angeles County.

"I'm embarrassed by my country's failure to acknowledge the rights of its youngest and most vulnerable citizens," student Lauren Spiegel said. "Our lack of action is especially inexcusable because the CRC can be implemented into our policies and programs right now. Provisions contained in the CRC are largely consistent with U.S. and California law."

With the Council decision, Santa Monica joined several other Cities in the nation, including Los Angeles, that have endorsed the CRC.