



PRESS RELEASE
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Associations call for a UN investigation into violations of the rights of unaccompanied minors in France

The French Council of Associations for the Rights of the Child (COFRADE) and Kids Empowerment, with the support of associations and citizens' groups, have referred the matter to the Committee on the Rights of the Child of the United Nations (UN) in order to denounce the serious and systematic violations of the rights of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) observed in France. This referral, declared admissible by the Committee, opens the possibility of an investigation which would be a key step towards reforming the regulatory framework currently in force in France and changing condemnable local practices.

On the basis of the information provided in the referral drafted by Camille Oberkampff and Delphine Mahé, lawyers at the Paris Bar and members of the Alliance des Avocats pour les Droits de l'Homme, the associations ask the Committee on the Rights of the Child to :

- Conduct an enquiry into the violations committed by France, a signatory state of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, with regard to the rights set out in this convention in the context of the reception and care of UAMs present on national territory;
- formulate observations and recommendations for the protection of these children's rights.

To support their requests, the associations provided the Committee with numerous quantitative and qualitative data, including concrete elements from field experiences illustrating serious and systematic violations of the rights of UAMs by France, particularly their right to unconditional protection. Access to care, accommodation and education are also addressed in the 80-page document, which unequivocally concludes that the rights of these minors deprived of the protection of their families are not respected in France.

The referral attributes the violations to two main factors: the denial of minority to which these children are subjected and which deprives them of the national child protection system, and the inequality of treatment of these children within the French territory.

Furthermore, the inadequacy of the financial, human and material resources allocated by the state to the departments responsible for the care of these children, combined with the absence of an effective national control or coordination authority, undermines any efforts to protect the rights of these particularly vulnerable children.

While thousands of UAMs present on French territory see their rights violated on a daily basis, the intervention of the Committee on the Rights of the Child must lead to the legal recognition of a "presumption of minority". Despite the recommendations of the Constitutional Council, the European Court of Human Rights and the Committee itself, this is currently lacking in France. It would, however, allow the protection of children to take precedence over all other considerations (including the fight against illegal immigration), while respecting the "best interests of the child".

At present, thousands of unaccompanied minors can only rely on the help of associations and committed citizens' groups, whereas each of them should be covered, like any other minor present on the territory, by the child protection system under the responsibility of the French public authorities.

The signatories:

- the applicant organisations
 - French Council of Associations for the Rights of the Child (COFRADE)
 - Kids Empowerment
- their partners
 - Alliance des Avocats pour les Droits de l'Homme (AADH)
 - Les Etats Généraux des Migrations (EGM)
 - Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)
 - Sororité, Solidarité, Accueil (SOROSA)
 - Utopia 56

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