

## Eye health care for all children cannot be achieved without peace.

VOSH/International believes in the freedom to see. Our 106 chapters work hard to provide quality optometric services to those who need them across the world irrespective of their race, sex, religion, social or economic status, gender identity, or political orientation.

This work contributes to the achievement of global goals for health as established by the World Health Organization (WHO) and broader goals for sustainable development defined by the United Nations such as the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). We work in places where the healthcare systems cannot provide for all, especially those most vulnerable and in need. We understand and have witnessed on the ground how the [WHO social determinants of health](#) impact access, awareness, and affordability of eye health services<sup>1</sup>.

Because of this, we know that natural and man-made disasters can impact severely these determinants of health and result in inequality in health outcomes for the populations affected.

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in society and that is why there are specific international agreements to protect their rights, including their right to health. The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) covers all aspects of a child's life and the rights they are entitled. It has been ratified by one hundred and ninety-six countries showing its global importance.

Every child has rights "without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status" (Article 2).

Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this (Article 24).

[UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

In conflict situations, children's rights and lives are put at risk.

I believe that VOSH/International's commitment to children's vision cannot ignore that conflict exposes children to unnecessary violence and trauma. Conflict affects the social determinants of children's health such as access to food, water, shelter, healthcare, and their future health outcomes if they survive. This should concern us. We cannot ignore these impacts as they affect our and our colleagues' capacities to treat patients. Our declaration on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is our

mandate to work against inequality and injustice through our clinical expertise and knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> The social determinants of health (SDH) are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies and political systems. SDHs can influence health equity in different ways and can influence health outcomes from 30-55%. Source: WHO [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

A child's life is equally precious everywhere. Whether in Haiti, Ukraine, Sudan, Israel, or Gaza today, children's health should not be compromised, and healthcare staff and health facilities protected. In many of these countries, further weakening of the already dire health systems will wipe away any progress made so far and affect children the most.

As humanitarians, we know that appropriate, accessible, and affordable eye health and vision care for the communities and children we work and care for can only be offered in a context of peace. Vision for all needs peace, not conflict. I invite you all to reflect on this.

Maria Arce Moreira, MSc  
Executive Director VOSH/International

***The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect VOSH/International or its chapters' views.***

*Besides working part-time for VOSH/International, Mrs Arce Moreira is a Board member of two international NGOs, [Sense International](#) focused on people with deafblindness and [Age International](#) focused on older people in low-income countries. You can contact Mrs. Arce Moreira on this article at [maria.arcemoreira@gmail.com](mailto:maria.arcemoreira@gmail.com)*

**Further resources:**

UNICEF -United Nations Children's Fund [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

World Children's Day [www.unicef.org/world-childrens-day](http://www.unicef.org/world-childrens-day)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

WHO Social Determinants of Health [https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1)

Save the Children <https://www.savethechildren.org/>

International Rescue Committee <https://www.rescue.org/article/5-crises-affecting-child-health-worldwide>