International Child Development Initiatives

30 years

15/November/2024

Speech by Giulia Cortellesi

Good evening, everyone!

Before I begin, I have to say, this is a *very* special occasion for me. Normally, I'm just a hologram on my colleagues' screens—you know, the one that freezes at the worst possible moment during meetings. But today, I decided to show up in the flesh, just to prove that I am real!

As you know by now, today we celebrate ICDI's 30th anniversary. That's older than most tech startups, younger than the internet, and exactly the same age as some of our youngest colleagues—those who claim they "don't know what a fax machine is."

ICDI started small, and—well, let's be honest—we stayed small. We're like that indie band no one's ever heard of but, once people do hear us, they say, "Wow, you guys are really good!"

But, what makes us so good? I believe it's our values: loyalty, curiosity, playfulness, and passion. That's the ICDI secret sauce. Though let's admit it—playfulness at 30 feels a little different. These days, it's less about jumping into puddles and more about trying not to pull a muscle when dancing at the office party.

When ICDI was born, from the brave minds of Nico and Rekha, we had this wild dream: to help create a world so safe, just, and joyful for children that our job would eventually become… unnecessary. A world where we'd close shop, and say, "Mission accomplished!"

But here we are, 30 years later, still here, still necessary. The world had other ideas. Instead of retiring, we've grown up—though, ironically, the slogan our former director, Mathijs created, says: *"Never grow up!"*. It turns out ICDI *did* grow up. We're 30 now, and we even do responsible adult things, like running webinars and making budgets.

Of course, there's a reason we're still here. It's because children are still caught in the crossfire of terrible conflicts—in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Syria, and far too many other places. Climate change looms large, civic spaces are shrinking, and the political landscape feels, frankly, quite dark.

But even in these dark times, there are sparks of light. Earlier this week, Asia and I had the honour of traveling to Helsinki for the HundrED Innovation Summit. Our TOY for Inclusion Play Hubs were selected as one of the *100 best global innovations in education*!

Anyway, modesty aside, going back to the spark of light, in Helsinki, we saw amazing ideas that made us think, "Okay, maybe the world isn't entirely doomed." And of course, children themselves are a constant source of hope.

Take the training on play we delivered to Ukrainian professionals last month—it was delivered during air raids, no less. *Poignant play,* indeed, as one participant said. Play is how children process the unthinkable, how they imagine new possibilities, and how they fight for their right to be kids.

And tonight, we celebrate the future by spotlighting 10 mini-projects led by children and young people tackling climate action in their communities. These projects are proof that children and youth aren't just passive victims of global challenges—they're agents of change, full of ideas and solutions. They are proof that, no matter how heavy the world feels, hope is alive.

Now, in the hope of a future where ICDI becomes obsolete, I'll give the floor to Asia, my co-director, friend, and challenger. Together, we also celebrate 14 years of working side by side without having a single argument! When we proposed to ICDI's Board that we become co-directors, we created a slogan: *We Are One.* And after almost three years, we still are!

So, Asia, now the floor is yours.

15/November/2024

Speech by Asia Koerten

ICDI at 30: Moving Out

We invited you to celebrate with us in this building, rather than the Child Rights Home for a reason. At the grand old age of 30, ICDI is finally ready to "move out of her home." It took a while—understandable, really, when you've spent three decades living by the motto "Never Grow Up!" So here we are, ready to spread our wings and step into a new chapter.

We chose this very place to mark the occasion because we couldn't resist the promise of its *New Energy.* This move isn't just about boxes and leases—it's a bold leap toward new horizons, all while keeping our roots firmly planted in the values that have guided us so far.

Shout-out to our partners

Before we go any further, I need to send a huge shout-out to our implementing partners worldwide. Many of you couldn't be here with us today, but you're very much with us in spirit—and in purpose.

From the very start, Nico's founding vision emphasized respect, friendship, and partnership. These days, "southern leadership" is the trendy buzzword, but for ICDI, it's always been our foundation. You, our partners, are the ones who keep us grounded, ensuring that our work remains focused on the children who need us most.

From knowledge to wisdom

As a knowledge-driven organisation, we pride ourselves on building bridges between science and practice. We generate insights, share lessons, and aim to benefit communities everywhere.

But, as the wise Japanese saying goes, "Knowledge without wisdom is like a pack of books on the back of a donkey." You, our partners, are the wisdom to our knowledge. You're the feet on the ground, the access to the real issues children face. You're the hearts and hands of our projects, and we are forever grateful to you for reminding us that sometimes, the most innovative solutions are just rediscovering ancient wisdom.

Challenges and resilience

Let's be honest—the climate for development work right now is a bit like trying to run a marathon in flip-flops. We live in the era of what I like to call the "double-double, half-half" effect: the number of donors and grants has doubled, but the average grant size and duration? Halved.

But, like ICDI's founders, we're not ones to shy away from a challenge. For 30 years, we've followed a clear path—not one of growth for growth's sake, but one rooted in justice and equity. We've always stood with the marginalized child—the one often overlooked by quick fixes and one-size-fits-all solutions.

And we'll keep standing with them, because that's who we are.

Thank you!

Before I go there is so many people I need to thank besides our partners:

First of all, Nico – for creating ICDI, for his continuous contribution and inspiration and for empowering us to carry it forward.

Secondly to our Board – for their trust, flexibility and support.

Thirdly, to our faithful donors – fuel to our engines, many of them have been on this journey with us for decades.

To my dear co-director and friend Giulia and to our incredible team – 10 individuals from across the world joined in this shared effort of moving mountains. And to their families who back-up them daily.

And finally, to everyone who has helped us move and settle in this new spot.

As you have heard Giulia and I had the honour of traveling to Helsinki for the HundrED Innovation Summit, where we were inspired by leaders in the field.

One quote from the Finnish Minister of Education stuck with us: *"Nothing we can do will change the past, but everything we do changes the future."*

So let's keep going. Let's embrace this *New Energy* and channel it into the work that matters most. Let's keep fighting for children, for justice, for a future that's bright, fair, and filled with hope.

Thank you, and let's raise a toast to the next 30 years—or, if we're lucky, to a world that no longer needs us. Cheers!