

Remigiusz A. Henczel
Ambassador
Regular Representative of The Republic of Poland
at the UN Office in Geneva

The Old Doctor in Geneva

The figure of Janusz Korczak is close to the Polish people right from their childhood when they get to know his moving story of *Matt Ist*. This book, which has been translated into many languages, accompanies children in different parts of the world.

In pedagogy, Korczak revolutionised the concept of educational process demanding the subjectivity of the child and respect for the small human, especially at the time when women and children were looked upon as inferior category people. Korczak acted very lively for the sake of drafting children's rights, which later were enacted in the World Child Welfare Charter, and accepted by the League of Nations in 1924. The original document kept in Geneva has, among other names, the very signature of Janusz Korczak.

A dignified and full of love for children behaviour of Korczak in the face of an utter degeneration of civilising values in Europe during The Second World War is a never-ending source of inspiration for the intellectual elite, governments, teachers and pedagogues, and everyone of us. Such an attitude supports the ideas of solidarity and humanitarian activity in international politics, and the struggle against any form of degradation of freedom and human dignity.

„The Old Doctor” went ahead of his time in historical, scientific and literary context.

Today, in the beginning of a new century, in a different civilisation respect, we still find in his words and deeds relevant values, however not fully performed.

The Year 2012 has been declared by the Polish Parliament the Year of Janusz Korczak.

This year marks the centenary anniversary of the founding of the orphanage, and the 70th anniversary of his and his foster-children's martyr's death in the gas chamber. Those tragic events belong to a different epoch, but today, in the Korczak Year, the world helplessly observes death, torture and injuries of children as a result of wars, violence and conflicts, for example in the Congo or Syria.

The children's rights that Korczak was pleading for have been valid internationally since 1989 when the UN General Assembly drafted a Convention on the Rights of the Child.

All the 193 UN member states are bound to this document, and the implementation of its resolutions is monitored by the Rights of the Child Committee. The UN General Assembly gave all the member states additional, official record to be signed which enables every child to place a complaint as a result of breaking their rights of the Convention.

A regular diplomatic representation of The Republic of Poland at the UN Office in Geneva is particularly predestinated to commemorate our great Compatriot. Consistently for three years in the Office headquarters, there have been meetings of the members of the International Korczak Society and the people inspired by his output where they discuss all the different aspects of the activities and works of this outstanding pedagogue and humanist. The groups of the participants of the seminars are represented by countries of almost all continents, which adds universality to the Korczak idea.

There are the headquarters of international organizations and institutions in Geneva such as the UN Human Rights Council, The International Labour Organization, The World's Health Organization, or The International Rights of the Child Committee which, through their activities, communicate and fulfil the most important message of Janusz Korczak: the respect for dignity and the rights of the child.