

A sustained international campaign by [Red para la Infancia y la Adolescencia \(RED\)](#) , the child rights network of NGOs in South and Central America, has resulted in the **rejection of a law that would have violated the rights of children in Panama.**

These laws, had they been passed, would have authorised lengthy prison terms and potentially the death penalty for children under 18 in Panama. Panama's minister of justice, Arnulfo Escalona Avila, suggested at the time that Panama would withdraw from the Convention on the Rights of the Child in order to go forward with the proposal. As a result of a sustained and widespread campaign by RED with the strong support of UNICEF, the laws were rejected in August by the Parliament in Panama by a small majority of 28 against 26 votes.

Panama is the latest of several Central American countries to propose or adopt harsh measures, often known as the 'mano dura' (firm hand) approach, to combat youth violence. The 'anti-gang' ('anti-Maras') laws in El Salvador have made living on the street into an illegal activity. The laws have allowed authorities to forcibly round-up street children, violating human rights conventions instead of addressing the causes of street-living and providing an integral response to the issue. Because most crimes are committed by adults, governments adopt 'mano dura' initiatives more for their popular appeal than their likely impact on the crime rate. A RED campaign in El Salvador saw some success at the UN in the form of a report, published by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, that expresses 'deep concern' with the measures taken under the 'so-called 'Tough Hand Plan' (Plan Mano Dura).'

See the website of [Red para la Infancia y la Adolescencia \(RED\)](#) for more information on the planning and success of this regional campaign.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is a group of 18 international experts on children's rights that was set up in 1991 to monitor the progress of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The report that is referred to here summarises the recommendations of the Committee to El Salvador, and is part of the committee's work in checking that countries are meeting the promises made in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) and at the Special Session on Children (2002).

To find out how to contribute to the alternative NGO reports, look at the [NGO Group for](#)

[the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Child Rights Information Network.](#)