

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

CRC@20 – ‘Hear Us Out’ World Issues Student Conference

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY

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CRC: All Rights for All Children

20 years ago, the world came together to say YES to children by adopting the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The CRC states that children, defined as people 18 years and below, have the same basic human rights as adults.

The CRC protects the human dignity and basic rights of all children, regardless of where they are born, the race or ethnic group they belong to, whether they are a boy or girl, rich or poor, living with disabilities or with HIV. The most basic rights are:

- the right to survival;
- to develop to the fullest;
- to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation;
- and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

Everything that we do for humanity begins and ends with child rights – peace and security, equality, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and saving the environment.

Since its adoption on 20 November 1989, the CRC has set in motion a process of social change, building the foundation for a world where all rights for all children are to be guaranteed and protected.

The CRC is used by UNICEF and states parties all around the world to change laws, policies, practices and attitudes related to children, to ensure that all children have all their rights guaranteed and protected. Malaysia signed and ratified the CRC in 1995.

CRC@20: What does it mean?

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It means that any child or young person born in 1990 and thereafter has grown up with their rights legally recognised and protected.

It means that any child or young person aged 19 and below today have grown up under laws and policies that provide better healthcare, education, protection from harm, and enable participation. In Malaysia, for example, the Child Act was introduced in 2001 to provide stronger legal protection for children, such as in cases of child abuse.

It means that children and young people have been able to survive and thrive because their rights are protected without discrimination; because decisions are made in their best interests; and because their views are heard and taken seriously.

It means that children and young people today have access to much more information and channels of communication, enabling you to be involved in, and advocate for, issues that affect you in the present and future.

It means that the children and young people of Malaysia have enjoyed better social services, particularly helping to reduce disparities among those from vulnerable and marginalised communities.

It means that fewer children are dying, more children – especially girls – are going to school, and more children are growing up in a better protective environment.

It also means that more needs to be done for children everywhere around the world, who are struggling to overcome challenges such as HIV and AIDS, violence, abuse and exploitation in homes, schools and communities, protection during emergencies and conflict.

Young people's role in promoting children's rights

As young people, you are not the property of adults, not even your parents or teachers. You are human beings in your own right, and you have individual rights and responsibilities to exercise.

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You have the responsibility to make sure your own rights are respected by others, as well as to make sure that other children's rights are respected too.

You are not just an individual living within your family or neighbourhood – you are a global citizen. One who exercises their responsibility towards alleviating local and global inequalities, and avoids action that jeopardises the well-being of other individuals or of the planet.

Be a do-er, not a hearer. Be a catalyst for positive change. Learn more about the CRC, educate others around you, organise campaigns and activities to create awareness about child rights, advocate to your community leaders and your members of parliament, and raise funds for children's programs.

Those around you should also give you more opportunities to exercise your rights. In schools and colleges, teachers should try and involve children as much as possible. Governments should also make efforts to give young people a voice at the national level, such as through government polls, fora and youth parliaments.

Your participation is good for others. Other people – kids and adults – may not see what you see, or understand things the way you do. Your insights and priorities can make a big difference to what happens in your community, in the wider community, and even in your country and the world at large.

Participation gives you a stake in the future. It allows you to use your voice to offer bold ideas and creative solutions to make the world a better place for yourself and people around you.

In 2002, the UN General Assembly adopted a declaration to create a World Fit for Children. Now it is your responsibility to keep an eye on governments and world leaders to ensure that they keep their promise to you.

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