

# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAYING



JUNE 2003 NO. 5

## A WORLD FIT FOR US, A WORLD FIT FOR EVERYONE

One year after the Special Session on Children and the Children's Forum, *Voices of Youth* is dedicating this month's newsletter to what young people are saying about a world fit for children. Since February 2002, young people from 100 countries have posted over 1,000 messages about what is needed, and what they can do, to improve the lives of children and young people throughout the world—and to help fulfill the goals set out in the Children's Statement: [A World Fit for Us](#).

### OVERVIEW

In May 2002, more than 400 child and youth delegates joined leaders from UN agencies, governments, organizations, institutions and sectors, to commit governments to a time-bound set of specific goals for children and young people, and a basic framework for getting there.

*Voices of Youth* instituted many initiatives to support the Special Session, including the introduction of a discussion board dedicated to the priorities laid out in the outcome document, *A World Fit for Children*. This board, more than any of VOY's other boards, has become a clear reflection of the many issues young people are concerned with today.

During the course of the past year, young people have used VOY to express their thoughts and concerns, and offer suggestions for the priority areas addressed during the Special Session. They have given particular attention to: the right to participate • the value of education • curbing the

spread of HIV/AIDS • and, protecting children and adolescents from abuse, exploitation and violence.

Young people on *Voices of Youth* repeatedly recognized their role as the future leaders of the world, and the need for their leadership potential to be developed and nurtured. They gave themselves the responsibility of harnessing this potential and believing in themselves. But felt that without the support of their parents, and a leadership open to their active participation, they would not be able to make the changes they know they are capable of effectuating.

Following is a brief summary of young people's thoughts, reflections and suggestions on how to create a better world. Please note that this summary's individual sections mirror those used as headings in the Children's Statement, *A World Fit for Us*.

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## THIS MONTH ON VOICES OF YOUTH

### [1<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the SSOC!](#)

What are the young delegates doing one year later to help create a world fit for children. **Read more!**

### [Belgian – Sudan Chat](#)

VOY teamed up with UNICEF offices in Belgium and Sudan to talk about child soldiers and culture.

### [New Summaries!](#)

Read what young people are saying about intergenerational dialogue and West & Central Africa.

### WEBSITE SPOTLIGHT

#### [Complete upgrade of VOY Sep 03!](#)

Look out for VOY's new design, more interactive features and updated content!

### UPCOMING

#### [Tell Us What You Think!](#)

Keep your eye out for the VOY survey and help us redesign the new *Voices of Youth!*

### INSIGHT OF THE MONTH

"If we want something we have never had, we have got to do something we've never done...we ought to create the change by being the change we want to see."

*girl, >21, Kenya*

UPCOMING AUGUST ISSUE  
**Child Labour**

# A WORLD FIT FOR US

## ISSUES IN CONTEXT

June 2003

Click on a link to read what Young People Are Saying about  
A World Fit for Us, A World Fit for Everyone

[Child Rights](#) [Child Protection](#) [War](#) [Health](#) [HIV/AIDS](#) [Environment](#) [Poverty](#)  
[Education](#) [Participation](#) [What Young People Are Doing](#) [Conclusion](#)

### WE SEE RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Participants repeatedly stated the importance of creating an environment that enables young people to take advantage of their rights. In addition to financial resources, participants spoke of the need for love, support, feeling safe and a sense of belonging.



#### NIGERIA

"It's not enough to give the child all he need monetarily but also to create an enabling environment which would protect the life, dreams, future of the world's child. Let's teach them how to love..." *boy, <21*

**Awareness:** Young people felt that to promote and protect their rights, they needed first to be informed about them. "There should be much more promotion about the rights of the child in schools, through the media. Only someone who knows their rights can defend them!" (boy, 12, Argentina)

They called on their peers to keep themselves aware, as well as to educate others.



#### SWAZILAND

"We as Swazi children are already paving the way towards a different world, the world fit for every child by raising awareness to all children from the roots and to every adult as well. I know that children are not only the future but also the present and the creators of a better future." *boy, 17*

**Laws & Leadership:** Participants also focused on the need for laws to enforce and protect the rights of young people. They recognized that these laws are empty unless coupled with effective leadership that is both committed and accountable. "Usually we hear our leaders make very nice promises and then the next thing we know is that they don't keep their promises. Sometimes one wonders

whether these promises are really worth it."

Young people asked both their peers and leaders to make now a time for change and to translate words into action.

### WE SEE AN END TO EXPLOITATION, ABUSE & VIOLENCE

Within this priority area, young people focused primarily on child labour, physical and sexual abuse, and the plight of street children. Participants used the board to express their outrage that children are still subjected to forms of abuse, exploitation and violence—especially in light of the direct link between protection and a young person's ability to fully develop and excel.



#### CANADA

"When the rights of a child are abused, he/she can lose so much from the society. This can lead to him or her to finding it difficult to contribute opinions and suggestions when made by his/her fellow peers...child abuse...degrades the physical and mental state of the innocent children." *boy, 16*

**Laws & Leadership:** Young people blamed the lack of effective and properly implemented laws for the continued exploitation and abuse of children today: "Child labour is outlawed in India but you still see very young children working in pathetic conditions. Policemen patrolling the streets often abuse them and try to collect money from them." (girl, 16, India)

**Vicious Cycle of Poverty:** Participants also recognized the clear link between abuse, exploitation and violence and poverty. Young people see poverty as taking away options and opportunities. Participants talked of poor families forced to send their children to work, and unable to secure safe working conditions.

**Education:** The fact that many young people who work are unable to benefit from an education was also a constant topic of discussion and outrage.



#### INDIA

"In India there is a lot of poverty and because of this poor people force their children to beg for money. Though schooling is available from the government for underprivileged children at very low fees the parents restrain sending children to school as they can work and earn extra money..." *girl, 16*

Young people are asking for each and every individual to "make all the efforts to make [children's] lives worthwhile and to give them a solid future." (boy, 16, Pakistan), and to provide protection and access to opportunities.

### WE SEE AN END TO WAR

All participants agreed that children and young people are the greatest victims of war. They spoke of war taking away happiness, security and the right to an education, and that without these rights, young people cannot have the same bright future.



#### THE SUDAN

"Since the civil war started in Sudan, I separated with my parents at the age of 7 and I have not seen them until now...The youth has suffered consequences that are created by our own disaster. Those who fuels the wars must be condemn to end their aggression that involves the use of child soldiers, children left orphans, homeless, and nothing to feed themselves."

*boy, 16*

**Role Models:** Young people talked about the immediate need for parents and decision makers to teach the next generation the value of peace. "Every parent should be someone you want to be like. So if our parents give their children the right attitude, it may be, that from generation to generation, the world becomes better, because children learn from their parents that brutality and war make no sense." (girl, 17, Germany). Working together the world can be a better place.

Read "[What Young People Are Saying About The Conflict in Iraq](#)" on VOY

## THE SPECIAL SESSION LIVES ON...



**Mansour Hamza, 19, Niger**

**What is your best memory of the Special Session on Children?**

No doubt that the most powerful

image of the Special Session remains the feeling of “unity in diversity” so successfully accomplished. Children from around the world, speaking different languages and coming from various cultures gathered for a common ideal: build a world fit for children. But the thing that really made a strong impression on me is the presentation made by a young boy from Haiti: with the help of two of his friends, he has been teaching children of his community how to read. This is the proof that we can really make a difference.



**Emily Simpson, 16, Australia**

**What activities are you involved in to help realize the goals set at the Special Session?**

I am a youth

leader at my local Brownie unit and am busy fund raising for various community projects and am involved in environmental preservation especially recycling with the Guide movement. I speak wherever I can about my UN experiences to try to let as many people know about the things I learnt there. When I leave school at the end of next year I plan to study to be a primary school teacher at university and to eventually teach in a developing country.

For more profiles go to VOY's [Youth Leadership Profiles](#)

## A WORLD FIT FOR US

### WE SEE THE PROVISION OF HEALTH CARE

Young people feel very strongly that all people, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender and age have the right a healthy life. They spoke of the need for doctors and international laws to protect the right to healthcare.



**MEXICO**

“...no estoy deacuerdo con que se asesine a los que estan enfermos esto se llama genocidio...que paso con los acuerdos internacionales y la protección de los paises dando ayuda medica ...creo que no es justo que muera tanta gente por la incompetencia del gobiernos.”  
*boy, 17*

### WE SEE THE ERADICATION OF HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS remains one of the most actively discussed issues on *Voices of Youth*. Participants, primarily from Africa, focus their discussion of HIV/AIDS on what can be done to prevent its transmission.

**Awareness:** Almost all messages emphasized the critical need for young peole to keep themselves informed and spread the facts about HIV/AIDS. Word of mouth, open dialogue and peer education were all put forth as suggestions for how young people can spread the message. While the need to bring HIV/AIDS education into the classroom was also stressed.

**Discrimination:** Participants also spoke of the need to stop the discrimination against people living with HIV in general, and around HIV positive orphans specifically. They recognized that every person needs to be cared for and supported, and that people living with HIV/AIDS need this even more so.



**KENYA**

“many have become victims of the deadly disease and we know we can show them some love and care for it is not like they applied for the virus but it was transferred to them unwillingly. we should help those who have not got it not to get it and care for the one who have it...”  
*boy, 19*

**Partnership:** The only way to tackle the spread of HIV/AIDS is “to work together for success”(girl, 22. Namibia). Young people asked everyone to recognize their responsibility and join collectively in the fight against the virus. “HIV/AIDS involves two. It cannot be introduced twice. It takes two people to decide. It takes two people to respect what HIV represents and its destruction towards the destruction to lives.” (boy, 17, Nigeria)

Young people also advocated for open dialogue around HIV/AIDS, both between and among generations.

### WE SEE THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

A clean and healthy environment was recognized as a basic and fundamental human right, a “natural gift”. However, participants expressed grave concern about the decisions being made today, and the enormous impact those decisions will have for the future. They blamed what they saw as “greed” and “consumerism” for exploiting and wasting our natural resources, and asked that the voice of young people be included in decision making, and that we improve our negotiation skills to make a better world for everyone to live in.

Participants used the board to talk about how they are helping to preserve our environment, and hoped their examples would generate some positive action:



**UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

“I will distribute leaflets in the neighbourhood and other areas and tell them to collect unwanted paper, glass and plastic refuse and drop them at a point for collection. It's a start .Let's hope we get the cooperation and can make a difference.”

*girl, 16*

# A WORLD FIT FOR US

## WE SEE AN END TO THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF POVERTY

Young people see poverty as a distinctly crosscutting issue. One that significantly impacts each of the priority areas outlined in “A World Fit for Us”. As with many of the other topics addressed, young people feel that the only way to combat poverty is to do so collectively and in partnership. They also discussed the immediate need for good governance and effective leadership if poverty, and the factors that exacerbate it, are to be curbed.



### GHANA

“The youth of Africa should not suffer for what our leaders have fail to realise. they should stop the corruptions and the injustices... We live in a world where even those who invented technology can not even catch up with technology; and all that our leaders do is to fight and “steal” all our monies”  
*boy, 19*

Global support and partnership were also discussed. Participants from industrialized countries, namely Spain and the United States, asking their governments to acknowledge their responsibility and “provide goods, services, and basically help [countries that]...don’t have enough money or educated people.” (boy, 12, USA)

## WE SEE THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION

Education consistently emerged as the predominant topic of discussion. More than any other right, young people feel that education is the key to progress and development, and to a bright future for all. Participants talked of education in relation to every topic, highlighting its importance for HIV/AIDS prevention, protection from abuse, youth participation and more.



### TURKEY

“While we should provide the basic needs for children, for them to continue their lives, we should give priority to education. That way, these kids will also work for other children and we will support each other. I think every one in the community should take responsibility on that”  
*boy, 16*

**Education for Life:** In addition to the

traditional curriculum, participants also suggested that schools act as the entry point for the entire community to learn basic lifeskills. Curricula should include lessons on HIV/AIDS, peace and negotiation and on “problems facing adolescents around the world”. In this way, schools will prepare global citizens capable of making change



### BOLIVIA

“la educación como base del desarrollo del entorno social de una nación en general, ayudara a crear la intuición, inteligencia, sentimientos generales y universales para el cambio de vida futuro y presente”  
*boy, 19*

“Usually when we children talk about participation and making our views heard, most adults see it as a passport to disrespect ... The adults have forgotten that the world is dynamic and things we know now they didn't at our age and might still not know. We have to move from the stage where children are to be seen and not heard to a stage where children should have a voice in decision making in matters that affect him or her. but unfortunately most adults see this as a rotten tone in which we sing.”  
*girl, 14, Ghana*

Young people want access to an education that teaches them about their world and their reality. One that talks about “what teens need and want...the rights and issues of our world...about HIV and AIDS...I think a lot of parents have a lot to deal with and our school is the place we go to learn and that's where we need to study about this.” (girl, 12, USA)

**Right or Privilege:** For many children and adolescents, education is seen as more of a privilege than a right. In the face of poverty and discrimination, young people talked of the cost of education, child labour, poor health, household chores, and other obstacles that prevent many young people from getting a quality education.



### PAKISTAN

“I think that every child in the world is equal and all children have the right to be educated and taught the same way as others. But it is sad to say that today many of the children in the world do not have enough education or some do not have education at all. Most of them work to collect some money for their family and support their younger siblings, many children around the world are victims of poverty

and malnutrition”

*boy, 13*

## WE SEE THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN

Young people on *Voices of Youth* feel very strongly about protecting and ensuring their right to actively and substantively participate in their communities and decisions that affect them.

Speaking out and being heard is seen as a way to unify young people around the world and create one common vision and mission for how to “make a difference”. Participation was linked to communication and cooperation, and the key to fostering partnerships and collaborations.



### VENEZUELA

“Los jovenes pueden lograr un cambio, en cualquier aspecto, por la via de la buena comunicacion y comprension. Muchas veces hemos sido ignorados en todos los aspectos, pero es hora de hacer que nuestras voces se escuchen. Los jovenes de todo el mundo deben tener una vision y una mision; y es bueno tenerlo...”  
*girl, 20*

**Leaders & Decision Makers:** Despite young people's confidence in themselves and their ability to make change, participants recognized the key roles parents, governments and other decision makers play in a young person's right to participate.

Young people on *Voices of Youth* called on their governments and decision makers, including UNICEF, to “give [them] an unhindered privilege to freely react and contribute on issues that bother on their future or wellbeing.” (boy, 18, Nigeria)

They also asked for partnership, seeing adults as potential role models and teachers, and feeling their own contributions would be strengthened through collaboration with adults.

## A WORLD FIT FOR US

**Virtuous Cycle of Participation:** Participants also spoke of the inherent value of participation. By participating, young people increase their self-confidence and gain faith in their ability to contribute and play active roles in their community.

Young people need encouragement and patience, a supportive environment and “room to do what they can”, if they are to assume their role as leaders of tomorrow—and today.



### SOMALIA

“Be patient with the children. Give them time. Don’t let them down. Just listen and care for them.” *girl, 22*

## CONCLUSION

One year after the Special Session on Children, the world is only marginally closer to reaching the goals set out in that historical session, and in some instances even further away. The thousands of messages on all of *Voices of Youth’s* discussion boards, and on its “A World Fit for Children” board specifically, demonstrate the continued commitment of young people around the world to achieve the objectives outlined in their, and the world’s, outcome documents.

“Quand on est adolescent on rêve de changé le monde ,on veut être les superman du millénaire. Puis on devient adulte et de plus en plus pessimiste en voyant le monde se dégrader.Ce que je veux dire par là c’est que nous sommes dans l’age idéal pour agir:nous sommes bourrés de bonnes intentions,d’ énergie et surtout nous ne sommes pas encore aveuglé.” (girl, 16, France)



### CROATIA

“Many of us don’t think about children around the world and what’s happening to them every single day. But I do. I choose to be someone who can help and change at least something. We should think about the future and act in its way. I think young people can do so much more. Talking and connecting are good start but we mustn’t stay just on that... We should make a bigger, worldwide youth organisation which could help us to be heard and to make a difference....” *girl, 18*

## WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE DOING... TO HELP CREATE A WORLD FIT FOR CHILDREN

following is a small sample of some initiatives undertaken by VOY participants:



### MALAWI

“No offense to anyone but talk is cheap. While we are busy discussing these problems, people are dying. Instead of discussing what’s happening. Let’s make a difference starting now.” *girl, 18*

### Avert Youth Foundation (Ghana)

Mission: Educating the youth especially on HIV/AIDS. (boy, 19)

### Nigerian Social Reform Foundation (Nigeria)

Mission: Founded by four students of the University of Lagos to protect human rights. (boy, 19)

### Grupo Juvenil ECPAT (Colombia)

Mission: ECPAT works in three cities in Colombia, Barranquilla, Cartagena and Bogotá, to end sexual exploitation of children. (girl, 18)

### Association des Jeunes de la Rue pour le Développement (AJRD) (D.R. Congo)

Mission: “lutter contre la dégradation de la vie des jeunes et enfants de la rue en soutenant les actions individuelles et collectives et appuyer les petits métiers.” (boys & girls, 18)

### Gulu Youth for Action (GYFA) (Uganda)

Mission: “To address the problem of HIV/AIDS through health awareness campaigns, human right abuses, research and advocacy...to rise up as youth to address our own problems.” GYFA works in the North of Uganda. (boy, 22)

### Coalition National Pour le Plaidoyer de l’Enfant (CNPE) (Benin)

Mission: “la suivie de la croissance et du développement des enfants et des filles dans de meilleurs conditions , et l’application des conventions relatives aux droits des enfants et au bien être de la femme.” (boy, 15)

### Grupo Juvenil en Defensa de Nuestros Derechos (Venezuela)

Mission: “Dedicada a promover los derechos de la infancia de la mano de los mismos jovenes, que juntos se han propuesto una misma visión: que todas las personas respeten y resguarden los derechos de niñas, niños y adolescentes en pro de un mundo justo y de dignidad humana, la difunde la campaña mundial en favor de la infancia.” (boy, 16)



### PHILIPPINES

“My suggestion crazy as it will sound, is that, all of us here discussing these issues take matters into our own hands. Lets set up a group...the internet is an incredible asset...let us communicate seriously about these issues and brainstorm on what is feasible for us, as the responsible percentage of the able population, to actually do....” *boy, 17*

## VOICES OF YOUTH

<http://www.unicef.org/voy/>

Since 1995, VOY has focused on exploring the educational and community building potential of the Internet, and facilitating the active and substantive participation of young people on child rights and development related issues. Through web boards, interactive quizzes, youth leadership profiles, live chats and more, *Voices of Youth* provides more than 20,000 young people from over 180 countries with an opportunity to self-inform, engage in lively debate, and partner—with their peers and decision makers—to create a world fit for children.

## **A WORLD FIT FOR US**

*Message from the Children's Forum, delivered to the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children by child delegates, Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta, 13, from Bolivia and Audrey Cheynut, 17, from Monaco on 8 May 2002.*

We are the world's children.

We are the victims of exploitation and abuse.

We are street children.

We are the children of war.

We are the victims and orphans of HIV/AIDS.

We are denied good-quality education and health care.

We are victims of political, economic, cultural, religious and environmental discrimination.

We are children whose voices are not being heard: it is time we are taken into account.

We want a world fit for children, because a world fit for us is a world fit for everyone.

**In this world,**

**We see respect for the rights of the child:**

- governments and adults having a real and effective commitment to the principle of children's rights and applying the
- Convention on the Rights of the Child to all children, safe, secure and healthy environments for children in families, communities, and nations.

**We see an end to exploitation, abuse and violence:**

- laws that protect children from exploitation and abuse being implemented and respected by all,
- centres, and programmes that help to rebuild the lives of victimized children.

**We see an end to war:**

- world leaders resolving conflict through peaceful dialogue instead of by using force,
- child refugees and child victims of war protected in every way and having the same opportunities as all other children,
- disarmament, elimination of the arms trade and an end to the use of child soldiers.

**We see the provision of health care:**

- affordable and accessible life-saving drugs and treatment for all children,
- strong and accountable partnerships established among all to promote better health for children.

**We see the eradication of HIV/AIDS:**

- educational systems that include HIV prevention programmes,
- free testing and counselling centres,
- information about HIV/AIDS freely available to the public, orphans of AIDS and children living with HIV/AIDS cared for and enjoying the same opportunities as all other children.

Continued...

## **A WORLD FIT FOR US**

### **We see the protection of the environment:**

- conservation and rescue of natural resources,
- awareness of the need to live in environments that are healthy and favourable to our development,
- accessible surroundings for children with special needs.

### **We see an end to the vicious cycle of poverty:**

- anti-poverty committees that bring about transparency in expenditure and give attention to the needs of all children,
- cancellation of the debt that impedes progress for children.

### **We see the provision of education:**

- equal opportunities and access to quality education that is free and compulsory,
- school environments in which children feel happy about learning,
- education for life that goes beyond the academic and includes lessons in understanding, human rights, peace, acceptance and active citizenship.

### **We see the active participation of children:**

- raised awareness and respect among people of all ages about every child's right to full and meaningful participation, in the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,
- children actively involved in decision-making at all levels and in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating all matters affecting the rights of the child.

We pledge an equal partnership in this fight for children's rights. And while we promise to support the actions you take on behalf of children, we also ask for your commitment and support in the actions we are taking, because the children of the world are misunderstood.

We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources that are needed to solve them.

We are not expenses; we are investments.

We are not just young people; we are people and citizens of this world.

Until others accept their responsibility to us, we will fight for our rights. We have the will, the knowledge, the sensitivity and the dedication.

We promise that as adults we will defend children's rights with the same passion that we have now as children.

We promise to treat each other with dignity and respect.

We promise to be open and sensitive to our differences.

We are the children of the world, and despite our different backgrounds, we share a common reality.

We are united by our struggle to make the world a better place for all.

You call us the future, but we are also the present.