

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAYING



DECEMBER 2003 NO.

OUR RIGHTS RESPECTED, RESPONSIBILITIES FULFILLED

Since January 2001, 2000 young people from around the world have joined *Voices of Youth's* Youth Rights board to discuss child rights generally and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Participants focused their discussion on the direct link between rights and development, stating that only when rights are respected and protected can young people reach their full potential. Young people asked that leaders partner with them and have confidence and trust in their ability take on the responsibilities that come with having their rights respected.

OVERVIEW

Young people on *Voices of Youth* feel strongly that the rights set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child are key to their growth and development. They see these rights as enabling them to build the life skills they need to negotiate the world around them and take full advantage of opportunities and resources. In addition to skills, rights are also seen as providing children and adolescents with an environment that protects them from harm and gives them the support and guidance they need to be who they want to be – today and tomorrow.

Young people dedicate particular attention to three particular rights: the right to participation, to education and to protection from abuse and violence. Participants call on leaders to listen to their opinions and take their suggestions and concerns into account. They ask that they be thought of as complete people in the classroom, invited to express themselves

freely and raise difficult questions. They also ask for respect and trust.

Perhaps equally as important, young people ask for support and guidance as they grow, calling on their parents and caregivers to give them information and direction, and help them build self-confidence. Where care givers cannot fulfill this need, because of lack of resources or other obstacles, young people call on the larger community and government to step in and offer additional support.

Young people ask to share in the responsibility of protecting and upholding their own rights, and want to be trusted and given the freedom to make a significant contribution to their own growth and that of their community.

Note: Rights & Responsibilities is the triennial theme of WAGGGS, and was explored in the [Nov 02 VOY-WAGGGS chat \(PDF\)](#).

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THIS MONTH ON VOICES OF YOUTH

UPCOMING

[Complete upgrade of VOY!](#)

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

[Water, Environment & Sanitation](#)

Get ready for new content, games and modules on water, environment & sanitation.

[Chats](#)

VOY is teaming up with groups all over the world for more chats with young people on rights.

INSIGHT OF THE MONTH

"We need to come together and formulate a plan to ensure the comfort and chance to every single child on the planet... We need to start doing something. I know that many of us don't know where to start because I certainly don't. Together I'm sure we can do something. We are the children of tomorrow, the future is our responsibility."

girl, 16, India

UPCOMING FEB ISSUE
Gender Inequality

ADOLESCENT & CHILD RIGHTS

ISSUES IN CONTEXT

December 2003

Click on a link to read what Young People Are Saying about Adolescent & Child Rights

[Rights as life](#) [Participation](#) [Education](#) [Protection](#) [The Convention](#) [Poverty](#)
[What can young people do?](#) [What can parents & leaders do?](#) [Conclusion](#)

RIGHTS AS LIFE

Young people on *Voices of Youth* see rights as the key to their development and growth. With the full gamut of their rights respected, young people can build the skills they need to become leaders and active members of their community.

However, young people feel that without their rights upheld they cannot focus on their development, and will be led down paths of violence that lack options and opportunities.



NIGERIA

"...The right of the youth is as right to him as his life. Once it is taken away we are left in the hands of bondage and violence becomes the second thought. The mind that would have been used to think of how to become a great leader would be used to fighting."

boy, 21

THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE

Of the many rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, young people give particular prominence to the right to express themselves openly and have their opinions taken into account.



JAPAN

"I think the young has the right to express their opinion. Most adults in Japan, see the view of the young to be of no concern to the world. It seems to me the view of the world by the Japanese is passed on from generation to generation, and this string has to be broken, as the view in our country is very negative"

boy, 19

Speak out: Young people encourage each other to take advantage of their right to be heard and speak out on issues important to them. They re-

mind each other that their opinions are valuable and significant, and that it is their right to express themselves openly.



KENYA

"We the youth today have very little say on things that involve our lives. Bombardment left right and centre seems to be taking the best of our opinions till our cry to be heard is nothing but ultrasound. Condemnation from anyone and everyone, with no intention to listen to any explanation, about subject matters, has taken center stage. Let us then join to make ourselves be heard on what we believe is important and promote good virtues to avoid violation on our rights."

girl, 17

Listen to us! Young people recognize that unless adults listen and respect what they say their words will have no impact.

Participants asked that their right to participate be recognized and that they be trusted with the responsibility to influence decisions affecting them.



UNITED STATES

"We should be given more freedom based on the fact that we have grown in maturity and responsibility...People need to start trusting the fact that youths really do know what's good or bad."

girl, 16 & boy, 14

Open communication: Young people also place considerable value on open communication and dialogue.

They ask adults to partner with them create an environment conducive to dialogue and mutual respect, and where all rights are respected.



MEXICO

"Yo creo que para tener un buen puente de comunicación con los adultos, especialmente los padres, primero ellos tienen que reconocer los derechos que tenemos los jóvenes, así como el hecho de que el modo de ver las cosas está en constante cambio conforme pasa el tiempo. Y después la clave está en la confianza y la libertad que se nos dé para poder expresarnos sin miedo, claro, siempre teniendo en cuenta los límites y haciéndolo con respeto.."

girl, 17

Note: For more on this topic, see the summary of [What Young People Are Saying About Intergenerational Dialogue \(PDF\)](#).

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

As with all of *Voices of Youth* discussions, young people feel particularly strongly about the right to education.

An education provides young people with the skills and tools they need to dictate how their future unfolds, and to take advantage of, and create, opportunities.



CHINA

"I think the most fundamental right for children is the right of education. It can prove one's cultivation, it can offer skills for people to exist. In general, it can change one's life."

boy, 16

School fees: The majority of participants feel that education should be free to ensure that all children can go to school, independent of their financial situation.

Still some participants state that in many countries governments cannot afford to subsidize all levels of national education, and thus students should bear the cost of education past primary school to ensure sufficient funds for teacher and other learning resources.



RIGHTS POEMS FROM NIGERIA

YOUTHFULNESS

Youthfulness is usefulness-
To explore the fullness of youths
In the council of lions and eagles
Keep the youthful youths useful

And the useful youths fruitful-
For the wasted youths are the plague
Embedded in our embattled psyche
That devours the taproots of our lives

And contaminates the fruits of our loins
Thus keeping our dreams in the briefcase
Like the gray hairs dangling in the gallows
Hoisted beneath the bloody western clouds.

How glorious is the sight of the flowers
Decked in the golden garments of a new day
And how sweetened is the measured hymn
Of the blessed bees, butterflies and baby birds

They embrace the petals and kiss the pollens
To deepen their celebratory in-built rhythms
And regulate the heartbeat of the crowned sun-
Youthfulness in use is fruitfulness in full.

girl, 21

BLACK

Take a look at me Tall huge handsome Like
my ancestors Strong brave heroes Survivors
of perilous time

They say I am black What's wrong with black?
They say black is bad How and why is black
bad They say because I was born black

Look into my eyes Tell me what you can do
That I cannot do If I had the opportunity Like
you had

If you see nothing wrong In my being black
Why do you say What you say Think of what
you say

If you think my being black is wrong Why not
go to my potter Who moulded you Tell him
that he Has lost his colour sensation

But to the potter Black is as unique as white
As red is to brown But to the moulded The
difference is clear

boy, 20

ADOLESCENT & CHILD RIGHTS



THE NETHERLANDS

"...I don't agree with your statement about the price you have to pay for education. I think all children must go to school. They must learn how to write and to communicate with others. All the children have that right. I think the base must be freely especially in third world countries, but when you want to become something of course you have to pay a price because you also need people who want to educate the students." *girl, 17*

Quality education: Young people on Voices of Youth clearly recognize that a quality education places the interests of the child first and encourages active participation and critical thinking.

They criticize schools that do not celebrate the uniqueness and capacity of every child, and ask that teachers listen to students' opinions and do more to foster dialogue and life skill development: "Each individual child is unique and can have the capability of bringing much creative potential to this world. The only problem is that our school system is not set up to cater to each individual person, but rather to a multitude of persons. Unfortunately, this leaves many of the voices of youths silent from actively participating in the classrooms." (girl, 21, USA)

THE RIGHT TO PROTECTION

The right to protection from abuse, violence and harm features particularly prominently in the discussions. Participants are outraged that children are forced to work, to go to war, abused and exploited.

Messages identify numerous factors that threaten the protection of children, including poverty, poor governance, lack of opportunities and lack of communication.



SOUTH AFRICA

"I have to say that yes child abuse is an important issue in our society but what we must learn is that if our own governments are not doing enough about it the youth should make means to help the victims and the possible victims." *boy, 16*

Participants call for the active participation of young people in their countries' and communities' decision making processes, believing that if given a voice, they can help create the protective environment children need to develop.

Note: Previously, the Youth Rights discussion board hosted the discussion on Commercial Sexual Exploitation; see the [Feb 03 Newsletter](#) for a summary.

THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

In addition to discussing individual rights, young people also talked specifically about the CRC itself. All participants agreed that the Convention is extremely valuable and, when upheld, provides young people with the tools and environment to grow into productive, healthy and happy people.

However, participants lamented that the Convention is not sufficiently known, respected or enforced. They spoke of people – both adults and children – not even knowing that specific rights for children exist: "Let's talk about children's rights'. I bet that if someone did say that, then some people would not even know what they were talking about. I didn't know that there was such a thing as children's rights, before I came to this website." (girl, 13, USA)

Participants also gave personal accounts of countries where children's rights are blatantly ignored and asked what can be done when there is no freedom.

ADOLESCENT & CHILD RIGHTS



PAKISTAN

"...everywhere we are facing the cops who mostly walk in civil dress and the take money from students...I need help and guidance if I don't agree with such rules and laws of a country... where there is no freedom...what should I do..." *boy, >21*

POVERTY

Young people see poverty as a critical issue to be considered when discussing children's rights. Participants speak of poverty forcing parents to sell their children into prostitution, make them work in harmful environments, or force their daughters to marry early.

Participants also speak of poverty as preventing parents from having the time or resources to support and guide their children, and of preventing children from getting an education, keeping healthy and having choices.



MALAWI

"This morning many innocent Children in Africa woke up without food, running away from a Civil war, being raped by many rebel groups, forced into marriage by the poverty of their parents, abandoned by their mothers, [and] failed to go school...Many of our brothers and sisters just require and extra dollar a day to live." *boy, >21*

CONCLUSION

Young people are asking for trust, partnership and responsibility. They are calling for decision makers and leaders to take them into account and uphold their rights, but they are also asking that they be a part of the struggle and have the opportunity to contribute to the success.



NIGERIA

"The nature is made up of three forces which should be filled with the following categories: children, youth and adult. Every category has their own ideas to fix .The is a need for us to obey the force of nature so that there will be an effective participation of all categories by doing this the world will be fit for us all to live." *boy, >21*

WHAT CAN YOUNG PEOPLE DO?

Actions speak louder than words: "it is about time that action accompanies discussion and we really really go about making big and small changes in our own ways...starting within our families and communities thus beginning at the grass root level as happy and responsible families spell a happy and responsible world." (girl, 18, India)

Unite to help others: "There was once a guy who said 'Our children will undo what we so foolishly have done.' Unfortunately, that was a couple of generations ago, and that responsibility now weighs upon US to stop the increasing amount of horror and injustice inflicted upon people today. Many WANT to help, but don't have the opportunity - how many adults want to listen to children? This is a growing issue but if our generation bands together surely someone will hear us. This website is full of people who all feel strongly about the injustices of this world. It is our duty to help others and fix whatever those long gone have done to our society." (? ,12,?)

WHAT CAN PARENTS & LEADERS DO?

Safe space for information and guidance: "lo que nosotros buscamos es orientacion,una organizacion que de preocope en nosotros necesitamos alguien o mucho mejor,muchos que satisfagan nuestras dudas ,curiosidades,personas en las que podemos confiar,una guia en nuestras vidas." (girl, 15, Peru)

Address fundamental issues: "il faut que la situation soit vraiment pris au sérieux en passant par les problèmes de base pour arriver au sommet. La misère et le manque des moyens adequat des conditions de vies. » (boy, >21, Haiti)

Government support: "each country must provide conditions for the children survival and development. We know many parents don't have conditions to educate properly their children, so the government shall help them with money." (girls, 17, Brazil)

Life skills: "Parents, grandparents, adolescents ou jeunes acompagnent les enfants dans l'apprentissage de la vie. Ils trasmettent leur propres experiences pour que les enfants affrontent mieux les risque de la vie et soient " bien dans leur peau, espit et ame" ils leur apprennent le régles d'une bonne conduite en societe, selon un code valable pour tous : la loi, la morale, la politesse...ils doinent aussi leur donner confiance en eux, leur apprendre à se tenir les affaires seuls, en sachant évaluer le danger et trouver l'aide necessaire. Ils ne s'agit pas de suporteger votre enfants ou d' ignorer les risques qu' ils court: Donnez - lui des moyens de se protégér pour en savoir plus." (boy, 17, DR Congo)

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.