

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAYING



WORKING TOGETHER TO PROTECT CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

In the fall of 2007, government leaders will gather at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to come up with solutions and make recommendations on how to protect children in war. These leaders will look at the progress made since a 1996 report – prepared by a woman from Mozambique named Graça Machel – made innovative recommendations on what can and should be done. In an effort to make sure young people's voices are heard, Voices of Youth conducted a survey, asking young people what they think should be done to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of children affected by armed conflict. Young people's responses, through the survey and focus groups, will be included in a report that will be a key document during the upcoming discussion at the UN. This month's newsletter provides a first glimpse at what young people view as the causes and consequences of war, how to cope with war, and their recommendations to government leaders.

OVERVIEW

From the staggering number of messages posted on conflict in the VOY discussion forums and the hundreds of responses to the recent online questionnaire on protecting children in armed conflict, it is obvious that young people are passionate about expressing their views on war and are deeply concerned about its effects. Their concern is justified: in the last decade more than 2 million children have been killed and more than 6 million injured or disabled in armed conflicts. More than 1 million have been orphaned or separated from their families. Between 8,000 and 10,000 children are killed or maimed by landmines every year. An estimated 300,000 child soldiers are involved in more than 30 conflicts worldwide. Sadly, the list of adversities faced by children in war and post-war situations just goes on and on.

Whether coming from young people living in war-torn countries or from ones who have fortunately never had to witness the atrocities of war firsthand, the message is loud and clear: war is a no-win situation; everyone

loses. Young people are acutely aware of the long-term, devastating effects of conflict, not only on individuals, but on whole nations.



REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

"I don't know what it is like in other countries, but children in Moldova don't care about staying in their country anymore. In the past, when a boy was asked what he wanted to be in the future, he would say a policeman or a pilot or an astronaut or a president. Now when asked, he would say that he wants to work in Europe." *boy, 18*

In recent years, a number of notable milestones have been achieved in the struggle to protect children from the ravages of war. The United Nations has passed numerous agreements protecting the rights of children and banning child soldiers. But do young people think that enough is being done to protect children and young people in conflict situations or do they believe that the wheels of change are too slow? Read on to find out.

NEW ON VOY

EXPLORE

["Focus: Photography in Action". Learn how children's photographs provide clues to their interests, concerns, and identities.](#)

SPEAK OUT

[The newsletter "What Young People Are Saying" is now available in Arabic.](#)

FROM OUR ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

"I am deeply troubled by the course that our society is choosing. Each day wars are being waged for reasons so trivial for such an intelligent people. People are dying each and every day from causes that we can stop. We are separating ourselves more and more and creating division based on our color, ethnicity, and mostly religion..."

[Join the discussions!](#)

TAKE ACTION

[Visit the new section on working with indigenous children on their rights.](#)

[Find out more about the Junior 8 Summit 2007 held in Wismar, Germany in June.](#)

ISSUES IN CONTEXT

June 2007

Click on a link to read what young people are saying about war

[Causes of war](#)

[Consequences of war](#)

[Coping with war](#)

[Recommendations](#)

[Conclusion](#)

CAUSES OF WAR

Voices of Youth members believe that there are a number of motives behind war, citing ethnic, racial and religious intolerance; colonialism; globalization; poverty; lack of democracy; and politics as some of the causes. However, the overwhelming majority believe that greed and lack of communication are two of the main causes of war.



CANADA

"The one and only possible cause of war is GREED! Greed for power/money/land." *girl, 18*



OMAN

"I think war is caused mostly because of human greed and misunderstanding." *girl, 15*



ZIMBABWE

"Greed, no respect for life (human and animal) and poor communication and conflict management skills cause wars." *boy, >21*

Some believe that lack of diplomacy and fair global governance can also lead to war.



INDIA

"I think one of the major causes of war is the fact that diplomatic talks and international dialogue have lost their significance and importance with leaders today. Lack of the UN Security Council's power renders all nations, especially the permanent five mem-

bers, unaccountable and free to do as they wish." *boy, 18*



NEPAL

"Believing one is superior and neglecting the existence of others and their views and their way of thinking are the main causes of war. We must respect what others think and talk to resolve misunderstandings and problems." *boy, >21*

VOY members believe that profit from the exploitation of natural resources, such as diamonds and oil, is a strong motive for war.



IRAQ

"Another cause of war is the existence of important resources in a country such as minerals, water, oil, food, and its strategic or geographic position. Other countries will want to benefit from these resources and this might lead to war." *girl, 18*

Many VOY members expressed their belief that religious and ethnic diversity can also cause conflict.



NIGERIA

"I believe there are many causes of war. The major one in Africa is poverty, the second is ethnocentrism/selfishness, and the third is the land ownership problem and sectarian/religious differences." *boy, >21*



IRAQ

"War might happen inside a country because of difference in religion, race, or having lots of different nationalities in one country." *girl, 18*

One girl defined a word from her native language, explaining how it summed up the causes of war.



ICELAND

"There is an Icelandic word, 'frekja', which has no direct translation in the English language, but applies to pushiness, greed, cheek and nerve. To elbow your way to the front of a line is 'frekja'. To snatch a toy from your sibling is 'frekja'. To think that you have the right to cause others pain, mental or physical, is 'frekja'. 'Frekja', mixed with overbearing behaviour, I believe is the cause of war." *girl, 16*

CONSEQUENCES OF WAR

During war it is the vulnerable children that suffer the most. Millions of children are killed, injured and maimed; they are forced to take part in combat; they are orphaned and displaced; they witness attacks and massacres; they are subjected to cruel and inhumane treatment; and they are deprived of their basic rights.

VOY members are painfully aware of all of these facts. They also believe that children are denied the opportunity to celebrate in full their childhood and are prevented from developing the skills that they will need to live fulfilling lives.



BAHRAIN

"War destroys children's lives. They lose friends, family, homes and education. Many end up living on the streets, turning to crime or getting involved in the fighting itself." *girl, 17*



POLAND

"In areas of conflict, children and youth are faced with many problems. The most important is famine. Then they have to learn how

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to live, how to survive in the world without parents (many children lose their parents in war). It is really difficult, for small children, who need love to grow up properly." *girl, 19*



INDIA

"Children and youth at the end of the day have very vulnerable minds. With all the bloodshed and conflict around them, their natural growth in terms of the mind as well as body is hampered. Education is suddenly a mere luxury which one can live without and survival becomes the sole purpose in life. Securing basic resources like food and clothing becomes an extreme challenge and keeping oneself and one's family alive and going is the top priority." *boy, 18*

Many express their grave concern and outrage for those exploited as child soldiers.



OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

"Children and young people are not only exposed to violence, they are also exploited by the militias to fight, and in many cases they are used as human shields." *boy, >21*



SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

"Maybe the greatest challenge is if they become part of war and are forced to fight and lose their innocence." *girl, 17*

VOY members focus attention on the need for and importance of education and believe that as a result of war, many children are deprived of this essential right, which has a negative impact on their future.



IRAQ

"Often during armed conflicts and civil wars, schools and other educational institutions are closed for one reason or another. This has a negative impact on children and young people's state of mind. Therefore,

relevant international organizations should strive to develop an emergency plan to provide safe places for learning and awareness-raising and offer meals as well." *girl, 16*



SINGAPORE

"Not being able to get an education. Education is an essential part of life that can mould better citizens and change mindsets. It is also the tool to break the poverty cycle. If children and young people lack this, then they will be fighting to survive as they grow up." *girl, 16*

Participants on VOY are particularly concerned about the psychosocial effects war have on children and young people. They are also worried that the scars and trauma of war will never heal, leading to more and more violence.



INDONESIA

"Children and young people will always be the victims of war or conflict whether they are killed or injured or even if they survive. Because even if they survive without a scratch, they will be the next generation that also causes conflict because all they know is hatred...with only a few who will think about peace." *boy, 20*



CANADA

"Living with life-long scars, embedded deep into memories that clutch onto youth through their lives. And even more difficult is for a child to forgive and realize that despite the pain they endure, repeating it is no remedy." *girl, 17*

Despite the fact that some VOY members believe that the challenges faced by children and young people in conflict situations are not affected by gender and age, most agree that they are. Even though in times of war both boys and girls can be used as combatants, young people believe that boys are more likely to be recruited as child soldiers, while

rape is seen as one of the major threats to girls. Following are some participants' responses to the question of whether or not they think challenges are affected by gender:



ZIMBABWE

"Yes, girls are more vulnerable to sexual abuse than boys and boys are also more vulnerable to recruitment as child soldiers than girls. Young children also tend to suffer more than the older ones when they lose parents as they cannot fend for themselves." *boy, >21*



GAMBIA

"Yes, young women are more vulnerable to rape, and therefore victims of HIV and AIDS, while young boys are used as rebels." *boy, 21*

VOY members agree that regardless of age, all children face many challenges because of conflict, even though the challenges may differ.



INDIA

"Children of younger age are more vulnerable and susceptible as they are still very young and can't quite understand what's going on." *boy, 18*



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

"The older the children get, the harder the challenges get. They might have to take care of their family by the time they are twelve." *girl, 16*



CANADA

"A child is a child: boys, girls, older, younger - it's all the same. War has the power to reticulate mercilessly around any child with grave effects." *girl, 17*

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COPING WITH WAR

While most VOY members acknowledge that diplomatic efforts, such as resolutions and treaties prepared by the UN and its member governments, have to a certain degree helped children affected by armed conflict, they believe that much more needs to be done. They argue that despite the existence of significant treaties and resolutions, there has been limited success in protecting children from the devastation of armed conflict. Participants see a gap between what is written on paper and what is actually implemented.



ETHIOPIA

"A growing worldwide movement to protect children from the worst aspects of war and conflict has achieved some notable progress in recent years.....Despite the advances, millions of children still live in zones of conflict and are the main victims of those conflicts. The UN General Assembly has taken a good step by commissioning the Graça Machel Study, but it should persuade member governments to convert to action." *boy, >21*



COLOMBIA

"...Most treaties are awesome and in a way seek to put youth as a priority in post-war crises and evacuations. However, they ARE useless if nations don't abide...and most of them don't." *girl, 16*

Some VOY members are more optimistic about the effect UN resolutions and treaties have had on the lives of children in situations of conflict, even if this effect isn't always as effective as it could be.



UGANDA

"They have helped through providing relief, trying to create peace between the conflicting parties." *boy, >21*



MALAWI

"Diplomatic efforts have helped, for example allowing the Red Cross to go into areas and help people. However, I feel that it is difficult to implement treaties etc. to the full as some governments are not willing to do everything required." *girl, >21*



JORDAN

"These resolutions and treaties have helped by providing safety and stability and have helped to prevent the targeting of children and involving children in wars." *boy, 14*

RECOMMENDATIONS

When asked what needs to be done to ensure that all children affected by conflict have their rights respected, protected and fulfilled, VOY members offer diverse and practical recommendations that demonstrate their clear understanding of the true impact armed conflict has on children and young people. Their recommendations focus on what they believe can and should be done, whether by themselves or others, to end grave violations against children during times of conflict.



IRAQ

"I recommend that any child below the age of 18 should not participate directly in war. Also, I think it is better that all countries should have a safe zone for children. When a war happens in a country, then all the children under 18 should be taken to that safe zone. Also fighting and war should be forbidden in that zone. This should become a formal and recognized right for all children." *girl, 18*



EGYPT

"...Each country should have a sensitization campaign about the effect of armed conflict on children, and the target group for these campaigns should be the army and everyone

who deals with the children affected by conflict..." *girl, 21*

Some of their most prominent suggestions include setting effective mechanisms to ensure compliance with existing international instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, promoting the rights of children, ending impunity and increasing accountability for violations of children's rights, and making sure that people who commit crimes against children are brought to justice.



INDIA

"The UN should have greater powers over the member nations and I think a more effective international law needs to come into place to ensure a legal solution to international conflicts." *boy, 18*



ICELAND

"I think the UN should do a thorough research on children's conditions in each country, compare them to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and then send the government of each country a letter explaining the flaws along with suggestions for improvement, taking into consideration the financial state and other circumstances in each specific country." *girl, 16*

Young people highlight the fundamental role of education for all children, including those in situations of conflict, in building a culture of peace and emphasize the need to raise awareness about the atrocities committed against children during war, in hope that this will act as a deterrent in the future.



ALGERIA

"Attempt to create an educated generation that knows what to say and how to act, mitigate racial and sectarian conflicts, create harmony between conflicting parties, and

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highlight catastrophes to show the resulting atrocities to people." *boy, 20*



COLOMBIA

"EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS... if nations are compelled to break treaties we should build a conscience within the inhabitants of a nation...we ARE the future and people should be aware of that...Right now, we are inheriting a very unstable world." *girl, 16*

VOY members see that there is a need not only to protect children in conflict, but to prevent the conditions that often lead to conflict in the first place such as poverty and injustice.



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

"I think that the richest people of each country should pay for every child affected by armed conflict to go to school, at least through high school. I've read that the most developed countries of the world made a promise to donate %0.7 of the nation's income to the worst off countries in the world to stop the endless poverty..." *girl, 16*

They stress the importance of children and young people being able to maintain some degree of normalcy in times of war.



UNITED KINGDOM

"Have youth clubs in a safe area so that they can have a place to go when things are tough and play like they deserve to be doing. Have kind people working there who know what to do in an emergency and are not biased." *girl, 14*



UNITED KINGDOM

"There need to be organizations that provide safety centres for children where they can forget about the situations they live in and also to come to terms with the situation." *boy, 16*

One member voices his concern

about post-war crime, when weapons are readily available and can fall into the wrong hands. He stresses the importance of disarming post-war societies to secure long-lasting peace.



NIGERIA

"Wars make a lot of ammunition available in the society which in turn can stimulate further crime within the society that is just coming out of conflict. There should be effective mechanisms to mop up excess ammunition after war. And the best way to achieve this is through national orientation programs by the government to educate the young people about the effect of post-war crimes." *boy*

VOY members acknowledge that there is a lot that they themselves can do to help protect the rights of children in war. They believe that one of their strongest and most effective weapons is voicing their opinion and standing up for what they believe is right.



ROMANIA

"Young people can promote dialogue between the two parts involved in the conflict; they should be allowed to participate at peace conferences and they should be given the opportunity to work with youth "from the other side" (the "enemies") in common social and cultural projects." *girl, 19*

Respect and tolerance were also seen as major contributors to a culture of peace.



PAPUA NEW GUINEA

"War is believed to be inevitable only because we human beings believe it to be so. If we as human beings can change our attitudes anything can happen. Just like the movie "Pay it Forward" a kind gesture and words are all we need to change the world." *girl, 21*



FRANCE

"Preventing conflicts is easier than stopping them, or the scars they create, once they have begun. To prevent conflict the best thing to do is to stop judging individuals on the basis of the community they come from. They're new people, at a new moment in new circumstances." *girl, >21*

CONCLUSION

Young people on Voices of Youth stand united in their desire to see a permanent end to all conflict. While they are realistic and acknowledge that this is highly unlikely to happen in the near future, they have faith in their ability to sow the seeds of peace and tolerance that they hope will one day lead to a peaceful world. They demand that the international community step up its commitment and efforts to end violations against children and young people in situations of conflict, as they believe that too little is being achieved and too late.



BAHRAIN

"So, as we sing songs of peace and goodwill.... let us remember the most important lesson of history: war makes victims of us all." *girl, 17*

For more information, read past newsletters from *Voices of Youth*:

[October 2005: Young people in conflict and recovery: Untapped potential](#)

[October 2003: Young people and war: Young people call for peace and tolerance](#)

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CALL TO ACTION

APPEL À L' ACTION

LIAMADO A LA ACCIÓN



18 @ 18 Online Art Exhibit

INTRODUCTION

In 1989, world leaders decided that children needed a special convention just for them because people under 18 years old (children) often need special care and protection that adults do not. The leaders also wanted to make sure that the world recognized that children have human rights too.

This fall, the CRC is celebrating its 18th anniversary, and as part of the activities to commemorate this historic event Voices of Youth wants to create an online art exhibit with your submissions.

ONLINE ART EXHIBIT

Choose one of the articles of the CRC and submit your artistic interpretation of it. The piece should include a maximum of 300-word explanation of how you perceive the CRC and how the article of your choice has created an impact on you. Your art piece can be in the form of a painting, collage or photo, so be creative!!!!

Art piece requirements:

If you are submitting an art piece by mail the size should not be bigger than:

-A4: 21.08cm x 29.72cm

If you are submitting a digital art piece, it should not weigh more than:

-300kb

Personal information:

Please provide the following information when you submit your entry:

1. Your full name
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Full address
5. Country
6. Telephone number, fax number and e-mail address (if available)
7. The 300-word explanation of how you perceive the CRC, and how the article of your choice has created an impact on you.
8. A one sentence long agreement statement saying that you allow UNICEF to use your piece for institutional purposes.

Deadline: Please send the design, with personal information, as soon as possible, but no later than November 20, 2007.

There are two ways you can send your submissions:

a - **To our Voices of Youth mailbox:** voyn@unicef.org

b - **To our UNICEF office in New York:** UNICEF-Voices of Youth, 3 UN Plaza NY-NY 10017

[HTTP://WWW.UNICEF.ORG/VOYN](http://www.unicef.org/voyn)
[HTTP://WWW.UNICEF.ORG/VOYN/SPANISH/](http://www.unicef.org/voyn/spanish/)
[HTTP://WWW.UNICEF.ORG/VOYN/FRENCH/](http://www.unicef.org/voyn/french/)
[HTTP://WWW.UNICEF.ORG/VOYN/ARABIC](http://www.unicef.org/voyn/arabic/)

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 thousands of 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.



YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROFILES

[SUBMIT YOUR YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROFILE TO VOICES OF YOUTH](#)



BIOGRAPHY

Mahmoud Jabari is a 17-year-old peace and children's rights activist from Hebron in the occupied Palestinian territory. He is the president of Hebron's Children's Municipal Council and an active member of Voices of Youth. He has recently become a member of Seeds of Peace, which is a non-profit, non-political organization dedicated to empowering young leaders from regions of conflict with the leadership skills required to advance reconciliation and coexistence. His interests also include modern history and photography.

ISSUES

Mahmoud is interested in voluntary work in all fields and continuously promotes volunteerism in his community. He is a strong believer in peace with everyone, including the Israelis. He has studied the Palestinian case in depth and states, "I want to show everyone the suffering of Palestinians and try to convince people around me of my perspective on peace." He also dedicates a lot of his time to the issue of child labour.

ACTIVITIES

As the current mayor of the Children's Municipal Council, Mahmoud aims to serve the children of Hebron and promote their rights. He recently helped to make a documentary on child labour, and was responsible for the film's field research. Mahmoud was interviewed by Unicef radio about this documentary, in which he worked with renowned Agence France-Presse (AFP) photojournalist Hazem Badr. Mahmoud has also founded the society of young journalists, through which he cooperates with his peers in an attempt to play an active role in the media in his country. He has also set up a website on Hebron that is managed by a group of young people; he aims to develop the website as a forum for young journalists. Mahmoud is currently a member of the Hebron junior police force, supervised by the Hebron Child Welfare Center, helping traffic police to regulate traffic and enforce the law.

As for the future, Mahmoud says, "I want to be a peace activist, in my country and all over the world. I aspire to hold a leadership position in my country, such as president or minister of interior or foreign affairs. But first of all, I hope to become a famous journalist in order to be able to convey the truth about what is happening in my country." Mahmoud realizes that achieving his ambitions will require dedication and determination. He aims to eventually obtain a PhD in international politics, and hopes it will help him realize his goals.

CHALLENGES

Despite his achievements, Mahmoud acknowledges that he still faces many challenges. For one, he sometimes does not get the necessary cooperation when carrying out research because he is young. He also mentioned that he needed a special camera for his society of young journalists but was unable to get it. "In addition, so many people in my community do not accept the idea of peace with the Israelis, which creates a lot of problems for me," he concludes.

MAHMOUD'S MESSAGE TO FUTURE YOUTH LEADERS

"The message I want to send to young leaders is that change is our responsibility in order to spread justice and equality, protect the oppressed, achieve our dreams, and create the world we want."