

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAYING



CELEBRATING THE 18TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CRC

This issue of *What Young People are Saying* is dedicated to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which celebrates its 18th anniversary this year. The world recognizes that children have rights and have an active role to play in ensuring those rights. In this issue children and young people speak out about the importance of defending their rights. They debate the effectiveness of the CRC, suggest ways to overcome the problems still facing by children today, and they dream of a world where all the children rights are realized.

OVERVIEW

Children's rights are set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified human rights convention of all time. Human rights apply to every human being everywhere, and are rights founded on the respect for the dignity and worth of each individual. In 1989, world leaders decided that children needed a special rights convention just for them because people under 18 years old often need special care and protection different from adults.

The Convention has 54 articles in all and it is guided by four fundamental principles:

- **Non-discrimination** (Article 2): You should not suffer because of your race, ethnicity, gender, religion, social status, etc.
- **The best interests of the child** (Article 3): laws and actions affecting children should put your best interests first and benefit you in the best possible way.
- **Survival, development and protection** (Article 6): the authorities in your country must protect you and help ensure your full development.

- **Participation** (Article 12): you have a right to a voice in decisions that affect you, and to have your opinions taken into account.



ISRAEL

“The CRC is supposed to give children around the world the right to food, shelter, and education. But what about children living in wars? What about children living in poverty? Children living with no home or food? I don't know exactly what the CRC provides children with, but I don't think it is enough. I think that every government and every system should take care of children above all things...they should provide children with food, medical care, warmth, shelter and education. In times of war, children should be protected. It is not a child's fault when leaders disagree. Children first and always...no exceptions” – Female

Although they may not be familiar with all the details of the CRC, VOY members are distinctly aware of how important their rights are. They have strong opinions as to the effectiveness of the CRC over the past 18 years. They are not afraid to support or criticize what their governments do (or don't do!) to protect children. Most importantly, they have their

NEW ON VOY

EXPLORE

[Speak out on Disability Rights and contribute your ideas to the child-friendly text of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.](#)

SPEAK OUT

FROM OUR ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

[Special Session of WFFC+5: Tell us about the World you want!](#)

“Some children are denied of their right go to a proper education just because they happen to be girls and their cultures make them believe that they need to stay home and wait to get married, and the boy goes to school. This is not fair because.....”

[Join the discussions!](#)

TAKE ACTION

[Special Olympics through quality sports training and competition and related programs, improves the lives of people with intellectual disabilities](#)

own ideas as to what young people should do to make a difference for the future.

ISSUES IN CONTEXT

October 2007

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

[The Importance of Children's Rights](#)

[Is the CRC Effective?](#)

[Continuing Violations of Children's Rights](#)

[Government Efforts](#)

[What Can Young People Do?](#)

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS:

Why is it necessary to provide children with special protection? VOY members recognize that because today's children are tomorrow's leaders, the future depends on helping children now.



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

"A bright future depends whether we raise our children with morals and good habits. Every country in the whole world must enforce policies to protect children's rights, because the world will be in their hands someday. Help the children today, and they will help you tomorrow." --Female, 16



KENYA

"Children are the potential builders of the future world and should not be left out as we plan for global development. For centuries we have spoken of children as the leaders of tomorrow." -- Male



SWITZERLAND

"The happiness of youth is very important because youth are the working force of tomorrow. Their decisions and point of view should be valued at a governmental level. Youth communities should come together and try to find the means to cure the problems we have in our life." --Male



NIGERIA

"What concerns children must be discussed by children. Children should at least be listened to before decisions are made that affect them." --Male

IS THE CRC EFFECTIVE?

What do VOY members think of the CRC? Do they think that children have more of a voice because of the CRC? Do they believe that governments really follow the articles of the convention? How do they think their lives would be different without the CRC?



MALAYSIA

"Children are not aware of their rights. Because of this, people often exploit these children's rights. In some countries where the societies are sexist, the condition of female children will be even worse. In some third-world countries, children from poor families do not have the chance to go to school. Since their government does not sponsor their education, they have to work from a young age to help to support their families."--Female



NIGERIA

"I don't think the CRC gives children more of a voice. Most children in virtually every nook and cranny of the world have very little or no idea of their rights. How can you protect/defend what you know little or nothing about? We must help children by educating them and keeping them informed. Governments don't really follow the articles of the CRC. They make education difficult and do not pay teachers adequately. We

must make them realize that children are the future and deserve to have their rights taken seriously." -- Male, 21



FIJI

"For as long as I can remember, the beating and abuse of children was an expected and accepted way of life in my country. Fiji ratified the CRC in 1993, but there is a lack of awareness, action and implementation at both local and governmental levels. Children grew up with the fear of the stick or abuse. I currently lead a youth organization known as Kids Link Fiji, which promotes awareness of the CRC. Our organization has run workshops and forums for parents, children and community leaders. The CRC was set up to enable government and policy makers to recognize the crucial role of children in our society, and it is time that we realize its importance and ensure that it is implemented." - Female, 20

CONTINUING VIOLATIONS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHT

Despite the CRC, children today still face exploitation, poor access to education, use as forced labor, and gender discrimination.



INDIA

"To overcome the problem of illiteracy, there should be laws for compulsory children's education until college. There should be strict punishments for parents who use their children for labor and do not educate them. Girls should be given equal importance in education so that they can train the next generation and help their families. A healthy child with an education is a basic requirement to help all *the under developed nations of the world.*" -- Male

Celebrating the 18th Anniversary of the CRC



UNITED STATES

"Many children are forced into prostitution by external situations. In certain parts of Africa, AIDS orphans many children, often leaving a teenager as head of the household. They may feel that there is no other option than prostitution to support their siblings. We need to stop this by setting up more centers to care for and protect such children." – Female, 15



JAPAN

"Many children are used as instruments by adults in the world. **Adults deprive children of their rights and use them cruelly as child workers.** Why don't governments do anything about child exploitation?" --Female



CANADA

"Someone should be doing more to make sure that kids aren't missing school to work in a factory or in the market." – Female



SIERRA LEONE

"It is unfortunate to know that a huge number of children are dying because of HIV/AIDS and that a large number of adults/young people are infected every 15 seconds. This is a serious problem that needs the attention of every individual. What pains me most is to see innocent children die from this disease." – Male



UNITED STATES

"There is absolutely no justifiable answer for the use of child soldiers. They are forced into a "kill or be killed" situation. Child soldiers do not wage war. They are simply supplied bodies thrown into battle; they are rendered useless otherwise. It is the adults that are the ultimate criminals. The worst part of the use of child soldiers: The next generations of leaders for said countries are being snuffed out without the slightest hope of life." – Female, 16



UGANDA

"I think the war against child labor is not yet won, especially in third world countries where life is really hard to live. The only way we can defeat child labor as advocates for the youth in the world. We also need to improve standards of living by giving countries and families ideas on how to earn a living without exploiting their children." -- Male

GOVERNMENTS EFFORTS

Government efforts are crucial to making the provisions of the CRC a reality in children's lives. Here, VOY members discuss what their governments have done to protect their rights, and what improvements are still necessary.



MEXICO

"The government of my country has begun giving more scholarships for children so that they can continue their studies instead of going to work. But the government should give children and education a bigger part of the budget. Also, the government should do more to include minorities: beggar and indigenous children are not clearly included in the plans of action of the government. The government should invest more in activism campaigns for youth. We young people are generally seen as a burden, because the government has to invest in us without seeing immediate payback; however, with a little help from adults, that can change. When adults or the government help us know how to act or give us opportunities to do so, we do make changes and are actually able to help adults ensure a safe environment for children." -- Female, 17



LESOTHO

"My country has introduced free primary education. It has also invited children to have a say in the refor-

mation of the children's protection act of 1980. As for HIV/AIDS, it has introduced a policy known as the Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Policy, which aims to assisting children in those categories so they feel that, being on earth, regardless of challenges, they are still at home." -- Male



KENYA

"The government has offered free education to all children to eliminate the level of illiteracy in the country, but it has not provided enough facilities to enable the program to run smoothly. Most children lack food at home and cannot afford books and pens to write with. I would suggest that the program was a good idea, but the facilities must be provided." – Female



BOTSWANA

"With regard to HIV and AIDS our government has done a lot in terms of public campaigns. The government has provided free HIV/AIDS drugs - a move that led to a significant decrease in the rate of new infections especially among young people. Stigma and discrimination were diminished by campaigns that encouraged open declaration of one's status after testing. Our government fought for, and actually achieved 100% access to education by both girls and boys, but a lot still has to be done when it comes to retaining young people at secondary schools. Girls are especially disadvantaged because of gender based violence, poverty, and cultural beliefs."— Male, 20

WHAT CAN YOUNG PEOPLE DO?

Young people have several ideas about how they can improve the status of children around the world. From helping existing international organizations, to creating their own volunteer programs, to simply

Celebrating the 18th Anniversary of the CRC

making sure they express their opinions, VOY members know that the best way to help young people is by taking action themselves!



AUSTRIA

"My idea is that an organization must exist where children can speak their minds. I mean something like J8, but the difference is that there should be one teenager from every country that is member of the United Nations and they should come together several times a year to discuss the many problems that relate to children and teenagers. After such an assembly they should write a short portfolio about it and one or two of them should present it in front of the UN." - Female, 17



UNITED STATES

"I urge youth to assert themselves, speak out, get involved in pertinent situations. In other words, wake up the world with youth creativity, enthusiasm and a fresh outlook regarding new approaches to lingering global problems. We need action and less talk!!! As a volunteer, I have created a volunteer program for youth which will have impact on the world of adults and which will confront the formidable challenges in a novel and exciting manner." – Male



MALAYSIA

"I think we should give full support to the international organizations like UNICEF, WorldVision, etc. by donating money to their funds or volunteering to help out in combating child labor. Besides providing education to the children, I think educating the children's parents and families is equally important. At least we should make them understand that making their children work as laborers will not save their families from poverty." – Female



INDIA

"To protect the rights of children, we need to bring about global awareness amongst all parents and people with the help of a mass campaign. Print and media should be the beginning, with compulsory showings of films and slide shows to parents and children in schools. Also billboards and television commercials in regional languages to reach larger populations." – Male



GHANA

"I am a boy who is part of an Advocacy Group in Ghana known as Curious Minds. We talk about how to eliminate the worst forms of child trafficking and labour in our country. I think achieving the Millenium Development Goals will be a very good target for our future." – Male, 15



UNITED STATES

"I think children can be at the very forefront of garnering change for this world. What is most imperative is the initiative and willingness to be steady in spreading and building awareness to the entire world. Children are more than capable of uplifting their voices to be heard. As a whole, the gathering of united voices of children will ultimately make the biggest and most lasting difference in this world." -- Female

For more information, read past newsletters from *Voices of Youth*. Also find newest issues in Arabic.

[Working Together to Protect Children in Armed Conflict](#)

For more information contact:
Maria Cristina Gallegos
Voices of Youth Coordinator
Adolescent Development &
Participation Unit (ADAP),
Programme Division
voy@unicef.org



CALL TO ACTION



Participate!

Provide your Comments!

Share your experiences on what works!

Article 12 stresses the importance of children's right to express their views in all matters affecting them. We also need children and young people to send their messages and examples for inclusion in the Handbook.

Read more on the General Comment on Article 12 and send us your comments. This is your chance to tell the world how to better implement this Article, your right!!

Instructions:

1. Read the [DRAFT of the General Comment on Article 12](#) or the [child friendly](#) summary, and either answer the on-line [questionnaire](#) or the questions in [this bulletin](#) – currently available in English and [Arabic](#).
2. At the same time or separately, send in ideas, case studies and experiences that could be included in the forthcoming **Handbook For Governments On Implementing The General Comment on Article 12**.
3. **Contact information:** please provide the following information when you submit your entry:

- Your full name
- Age
- Gender
- Full address
- Country

4. Deadline: Please send your comments with contact information, as soon as possible, but no later than October 31, 2007 to our Voices of Youth Mailbox: voy@unicef.org

[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](#)



Chernor Abdulai Bah is a 21-year old youth leader from Sierra Leone.

He was President of the Children's Forum, leader of the Youth Parliament, Secretary General of the Human Rights Clinic, Secretary General of the Students Union and was a Junior Executive Producer of the UN Voice of Children Radio Project.

During Sierra Leone's 11 years of war, Chernor fled his home and lived first as an IDP and later as a refugee. When he returned home, he began to promote child rights, playing a key role in the country's immediate post-conflict recovery efforts.

What issue are you particularly active in, and why have you chosen this issue?

I am interested in young people's participation in all issues concerning them. I became involved with promoting such issues because there was a massive gap in our country and it was apparent that it was threatening the future of Sierra Leone.

Can you give some specific examples of the kinds of actions/projects you have carried out related to this issue?

Under my leadership, my organization, the Children's Forum Network, established over 50 clubs in schools and communities committed to addressing issues pertinent to them at their respective levels. Nationally, after our campaign, a child rights law has been passed in which we were involved.

What were your successes, challenges and/or obstacles in carrying out these actions/projects?

Our successes include the active clubs and the issues they are addressing on a day to day basis, the Child Rights Act in Sierra Leone, our presentation and the follow-up of our recommendations to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and our radio project. Challenges included lack of support, time and capacity.

Why do you consider yourself a youth leader?

As a young person, I feel passionate about the problems and issues affecting us. I am willing, amidst the odds, to stand up and confront the issues, including speaking on behalf of the voiceless and invisible.

What are your future plans related to this issue?

I am dedicated to these issues and will remain so for the rest of my life. I want change and development and my belief is that these can only be truly achieved with young people at the lead. I will keep pushing these issues.

What one message would you like to send to other future youth leaders?

Believe in yourselves and in the power of the young people you lead – they are the greatest resources you can ever have. Value them!

[PARTICIPATE in our SELECTION!!!](#)

If you are an activist in your community and you want to share with us what you have done, please [submit your information](#) in our [Youth Leadership Profile form](#).

Click here if you want to see more [examples of others Youth Leadership Profiles!](#)