

# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAYING



## THE WORLD WE WANT

In May 2002, the countries of the world met in New York to decide what should be done to improve the lives of children. At this landmark meeting – the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children (SSC) – the nations of the world committed themselves to a series of goals to improve the situation of children and young people, with a particular focus on four main priorities: promoting healthy lives; providing quality education; protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence; and combating HIV/AIDS. The new global agenda – a document called ‘A World Fit for Children’ - describes the promises made by governments to improve the lives of children from 2002-2012. In December 2007, world leaders will meet once again in New York to review progress made towards creating a better world for children. This month’s issue of “What Young People Are Saying” is dedicated to how young people view their world and how “fit” they think it really is.

### OVERVIEW

With the Special Session +5 Review taking place this month, young people are discussing the current state of the world as they see it, and the progress that has been achieved in the five years since the Special Session of 2002. Young people are aware that since the Special Session, millions of young lives have been saved: Global child deaths have reached a record low, falling to 9.7 million, down from almost 13 million in 1990; more children than ever are in school and more children are actively involved in decisions concerning their lives. However, they are also aware that too many children still die of preventable diseases, go hungry, are denied their right to an education or are forced into early marriage or hazardous work. Too many children are devastated by armed conflict, the sale and trafficking of children, or other forms of abuse and violence. Too many children have been orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS. And too many of them will never experience a childhood.

Despite feeling that not enough has been done, VOY members are quick to point out that they have not lost

hope. They believe progress for children and the achievement of the goals of the Special Session - a stepping stone towards realizing the Millennium Development Goals - are still possible. They stress that if the world is going to be truly fit for children, it is going to require action not just by governments and by organizations, but by families, communities and individuals, including young people themselves.



#### SOUTH AFRICA

“Personally, I feel that this world has let us down, but we can't sit around and complain all day. Children all over the world are dying... and the worst thing is that help is either always too late or it simply never arrives. My wish is that young people all over the world will pull together and achieve these goals.”

*Female, 18*

So, on the fifth anniversary of the SSC, how far have we come? What problems still exist? What can be done to build a world fit for children? Read on to find out what young people are saying.

## NEW ON VOY

### EXPLORE

[The Youth Report on War and Conflict was launched! A group of young people introduced it!](#)

### SPEAK OUT

[What has your country done to make A World Fit for Children?](#)

### FROM OUR ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

“Listen to the kids for once instead of deciding for them what is right for them and what they think is wrong, no kid wants to be unhealthy, uneducated, abused or ignorant.”

[Join the discussions!](#)

### TAKE ACTION

[Unite for Child Survival: Radio Drama Competition](#)

[A World Fit for Children](#)

## ISSUES IN CONTEXT

December 2007

Click on a link to read what young people are saying about the world they want

[The main priorities](#)

[Progress made](#)

[Ways forward](#)

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### THE MAIN PRIORITIES

Voices of Youth members recognize that all children have fundamental rights: the right to health and nutrition, to an education, to clean water and adequate sanitation, to gender equality and to freedom from exploitation and abuse. Moreover, children have a right to a name and a nationality - as well as to express themselves freely and to participate in decisions that affect them. They are also aware of the extent to which poverty, HIV/AIDS, conflict and discrimination negatively impact the lives of children and adolescents. In fact, young people single out poverty as the root cause of many problems. They point out that poverty prevents children from attaining basic rights such as the right to a healthy life and the right to an education.



#### OMAN

"I think there are many problems facing children and I think the three most important ones are poverty, getting a proper education, and living in a safe house with their families or people who truly care about them."  
*Female, 15*



#### PHILIPPINES

"Poverty is one of the greatest problems that the world is facing today. Everywhere you look there's always a sign of it. Just look down the side streets and there you'll find many men, women, and children wearing tattered clothes, braving the scorching heat of the day and the freezing cold of the night. They have no where to go to, no one to run to."  
*Female, 17*

Young people see education as a basic human right, vital to personal and societal development and well being. They believe that all children should be entitled to quality, free education, but sadly acknowledge that it is still a distant dream for millions of children all over the world, especially for girls, for those in rural areas, those of poorer families and those living in conflict zones.



#### NIGERIA

"Education is a major problem in my country...On the streets you see small children selling all kind of things ... in order to provide a little income for their family; because of this, these children miss school. Sometimes I wonder where most of our future leaders will come from because most of the children are on the streets doing odd jobs instead of going to school."  
*Female, 15*



#### UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

"How can a young child concentrate on lessons when he is starving?"  
*Female, 15*

Many members point out that higher education is inaccessible to many young people around the world because of the high cost.



#### IRAQ

"Young people cannot continue their education for many reasons, one of the most important is war and conflict. But in addition, young people cannot continue their higher education because of the high cost. I know many friends who have had to drop out of university because they

cannot afford it. There should be a group effort to enable young people to continue their education."  
*Male*

VOY members consider lack of protection as one of the major obstacles that needs to be overcome if the world is to be made a better place. They wonder how the education goals of "A World Fit for Children" can be achieved, for example, if children still have to work to survive.



#### SIERRA LEONE

"I do believe education is a basic human right. If all the rich and poor can have quality education then we can say we would be able to meet the MDGs. But I have a very strong reservation about meeting the time frame. Poor people are more concerned with getting daily bread, so they prefer to send their kids to work than to school. If they send their kids to school they are sure to die of hunger."  
*Male, > 21*

They believe that challenges persist in many areas, including the use of children in armed conflict, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, trafficking and sexual exploitation.



#### JORDAN

"Personally, I think it's shameful that in the 21st century, with all the so-called advancement and promises made by the international community, children continue to suffer because of war. They are forced to fight; they are killed, tortured and maimed; they are imprisoned, uprooted and orphaned. And then we have the audacity to call ourselves "human" beings. Worst of all, the situation just seems to get worse and worse."  
*Female, 19*



## REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

"Nothing is being done by anyone to stop human trafficking and sexual exploitation. ...I've heard some really sad stories about it. VERY SAD, but big money is involved in this business, that's why no one is interested in stopping it." *Female, > 21*



## UNITED KINGDOM

"Child prostitution is a growing problem worldwide. .... And indications are that in every part of the world the number of children being harmed in this way is growing. Child prostitutes are found in virtually every country. There is an apparent increasing demand globally; part of it fed by the fear of AIDS and the naive belief that younger sex partners are free of disease." *Male, > 21*



## SAUDI ARABIA

"Don't you think that subjecting a girl to female genital mutilation is one of the biggest human rights violations, a great crime? Girls as young as seven have bled to death as a result of this procedure. It is not an excuse that it is a tradition. Traditions as harmful as this should be abolished. We have to make people understand that it is okay to abandon such traditions." *Female*

VOY members are acutely aware that HIV/AIDS is an epidemic that continues to devastate families, communities and even whole continents. They believe that the rate of infection with HIV is still very high, and point out that preventing new HIV infections is key to controlling the epidemic.



## KENYA

"Today's youth are the AIDS generation; they have never known a world without HIV. Millions have died, yet the epidemic remains largely

invisible to adults and even to young people themselves." *Male, 20*

They point out that many countries other than those in Africa have a high incidence of HIV/AIDS and are concerned that they these countries are being overlooked.



## CANADA

"...Every time we talk about AIDS, the first thing to come up is Africa. Yes! It is a VERY huge problem in African and 3rd world nations...In reality AIDS is affecting ALL nations, even nations with advanced medical facilities like Canada and the United States..." *Female, 21*

While some VOY members indicate that there is a lack of information in their countries, others are worried that an overload of information has had a negative impact on efforts to combat the disease.



## AUSTRALIA

"It is a tough situation when people become tired of hearing about such an important and fatal issue such as HIV/AIDS. From what I have gathered, they are sick of hearing about it, thus no longer caring." *Male, 17*

## PROGRESS MADE

Despite expressing their grave concern for the present state of the world's children, most young people acknowledge that some progress has been achieved in realizing the commitments set out in "A World Fit for Children".

They see that the first duty toward children is to ensure that they survive. Many young people believe that significant efforts have been made to promote healthy lives.



## JORDAN

"I am proud of what my country has done to make life better for children.

It has provided universal health insurance coverage for all children under six and it provides childhood vaccines free of charge." *Male, 17*



## BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

"From the time a child is still in the mother's womb, until the person is old, there is free health care. The government is even willing to send patients overseas if no such treatment is available locally." *Male, 19*

VOY members stress that all children should have access to and complete primary education that is free, compulsory and of good quality. They point out some interventions taken by their governments to help improve access and retention.



## MALAYSIA

"In some schools in Malaysia there is a Milk Scheme and Pocket Money Programme giving money and milk to impoverished children." *Male*



## 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." *Female, 17*



## BOTSWANA

"With regard to education our government fought for, and actually achieved, 100% access to education for BOTH females and males... It is worth noting that the Ministry of Education, in partnership with a UNICEF-initiated Female-Male Education Movement, is currently campaigning for rights-based and gender-sensitive schools." *Male, 20*

# The World We Want

The right of all children to be protected against all forms of violence, discrimination, exploitation and abuse is something young people feel very strongly about. They believe that protecting children from violence, exploitation and abuse is an integral component of protecting their rights to survival, growth and development. While the majority believes that gross violations are still being committed, some point out that some effort is being made to better protect children.



## LESOTHO

"A world fit for children is a world fit for everyone! My country has endeavored to make this real by introducing free primary education. It has also invited children to have a say in the reformation of the Children's Protection Act of 1980." *Male 20*



## MEXICO

"I think that even if things are being done to ensure a safe environment for children, the Mexican government still has a lot to do to achieve this goal." *Female, 17*

As for combating HIV/AIDS, young people acknowledge that progress has been made, but believe there is room for improvement. In addition, they seem baffled that despite all efforts aimed at reducing HIV infection, children and their families continue to suffer from the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS as it continues to ravage large parts of the world today.



## MALAWI

"I come from Malawi, where HIV/AIDS is a major problem....We have a lot of foreign aid and the government is pouring money into the country to fight this pandemic and there are scores of campaigns targeted at just everyone imaginable, particularly at grassroots level so that people get the message. But this is proving fruitless, with the

numbers of people catching the virus still increasing." *Male*

They also mention some strategies implemented by their governments to reduce the spread of the disease.



## MALAYSIA

"The government has started a programme where most medical centers will offer free unused/new syringes for drug addicts to prevent the sharing of syringes, which could lead to AIDS." *Male*

## WAYS FORWARD

There is a palpable sense of urgency when young people debate what needs to be done to make up for lost time, and march towards the goals intended to make the world a better place for ALL children. Though undoubtedly aware of the serious plight of children in poorer parts of the world, young people also point out that it is not only children in third world countries that are being denied their rights.



## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

"I live in a developed country, so my country never does much. They figure they don't need to. It's pretty sad." *Female*

Despite young people's confidence in themselves and their ability to make change, participants recognize the key role of parents, governments and other decision makers in fulfilling the promises made to children. They also call on adults to involve young people in matters that concern them.



## GHANA

"Most of the times all our leaders do about children's issues is to make promises and read us long speeches. It is high time they are called to act ... To achieve the Millennium Development Goals, all of us will have to work hand in hand

irrespective of who is an adult and who is a child. The children have to be consulted and accepted as partners on issues concerning them. The child cannot wait." *Female, 18*



## MEXICO

"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 changes. When adults or the government ... give us opportunity to do so, we do make a change and are actually able to help adults ensure a safe environment for children." *Female, 17*

VOY members offer simple but practical suggestions to improve the situation for children and young people. For example, they point out that for poorer countries, debt repayment is a major obstacle to investment in basic services, especially those targeting children. They believe that debt relief should be more generous.



## NEW ZEALAND

"One of the main sources of poverty in my opinion is debt. To pay back the money, many governments are making cuts on social spending like education. Developed countries need to forgive the debt before change can start being made." *Female, 18*

They believe that richest countries should increase their assistance to the poorest countries.



## SINGAPORE

"I strongly feel that less fortunate countries should be aided by developed countries and other international organizations such as the UN. Otherwise, the poor will

# The World We Want

become poorer and the rich will become richer." *Female, 17*



## NORWAY

"There are enough resources in this world to supply all, but the wealth is so unfairly distributed: some have nothing while others have way too much! If we all stand together we CAN make a difference, we just need to make the governments in the industrialized countries realize that they have to help make this world a better place." *Female, 19*

Young people believe that corporate initiatives can play an important role in alleviating poverty and helping achieve a better world for children.



## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

"Many businesses claim they are helping countries secure clean water for their people, or provide affordable electricity... businesses have the resources and power in various countries to make change possible." *Male, > 21*

Young people believe that it is the government's responsibility first and foremost to provide education to its citizens. They suggest that they need to invest more in education to ensure Access for All. They point out that it would be much wiser if money were spent on education instead of weapons of destruction



## INDIA

"Education is the best way to eradicate the problems of poverty, unemployment, and ethnic conflicts. It shouldn't be a dream for education to be free. If a country can spend huge amounts of money on missiles.....why not divert that money for the betterment of the people?" *Female, 20*

Young people stress that no form of violence against children is justifiable. They point out effective ways to prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation, such as

including programmes to support parenting skills; programmes to improve school environment; increasing accountability for perpetrators, and for young people themselves to campaign against all forms of violence and abuse.



## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

"For instance, we could start writing letters to government officials. Start showing advertisements on television. We could start handing out flyers. The more people that know about it, the more government officials will be alert about it." *Female, > 21*

Although there has been significant progress in fighting HIV/AIDS, VOY members are aware that children and youth are still missing out. They share many ideas on combating HIV/AIDS and mitigating the effects of the disease on children, including improving awareness of this global pandemic, encouraging community participation, increasing access to treatment and reducing the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS.



## TUNISIA

"We would have less of a problem if we had sex education in class, if we had easy access to contraception and especially condoms, if the government gave free AIDS tests, if society did not shun those with HIV, if people were actually aware of what exactly AIDS is." *Female*

Young people believe that they themselves are the greatest asset towards making the world a better place. Every little bit counts!



## IRAQ

"We can be the change we want to see in the world ...and a thousand mile journey begins with one step." *Female, 20*



## CANADA

"It is totally up to us to make these things come true. Let's make the Millennium Development Goals happen! Let's build a school in a poor country; dig a well; sponsor a child; demonstrate peace, tolerance and love; be an example for others." *Female, 19*

## CONCLUSION

Five years after the Special Session on Children, Most VOY members believe there is still a chance that the promises made to children at the historic event of 2002 can still be fulfilled; however, they are adamant that the only way to move forward is for all stakeholders to join together, including young people themselves, in what they believe will surely be a struggle to reach the finish line. It is clear from the discussion boards that young people around the world are committed, now more than ever, to achieving the objectives that will make their world what they want it to be. To them, failure to achieve the goals of "A World Fit for Children" is simply not an option. They have a crystal clear image of the world that they want and they are out to get it!



## GHANA

"A world fit for children is a world where every child has enough good food to eat every single day; a world where children are supported to achieve their ambitions no matter what they are; a world where children have never heard the sound of a gun or have ever seen one; a world where every single child is filled with joy and plenty of happiness; and most important of it all, a world where children can go to school every single day." *Male*

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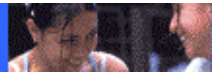
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CALL TO ACTION

APPEL À L' ACTION

LIAMADO A LA ACCIÓN



## Unite for Child Survival: Radio Drama Competition



### INTRODUCTION

UNICEF's 2008 State of the World's Children report urges the global community to pay more attention to child survival. Community involvement, political will and global health partnerships are all necessary to save children who are dying from preventable causes. Voices of Youth seeks creative radio dramas from around the world to bring to life issues that affect children's health.

### WHAT TO DO

Send in a script for a radio drama. Please note, we are NOT asking for an actual recording. The competition asks only for a WRITTEN script.

### CRITERIA

- Scripts will be judged on creativity, structure, writing and how well the theme is expressed. Participants must be under age 25.
- Submissions must be original and unpublished.
- Individual and group submissions are both fine.
- Please submit a written script for a radio drama. We will NOT accept recorded pieces.
- Language: English, French, Spanish or Arabic.
- Length: The script should make a finished radio play no longer than 7 minutes.
- Content: Submissions which contain any of the following will not be accepted:
  - Positive portrayals of illegal drug use or alcohol abuse.
  - Derogatory characterizations of any ethnic, racial, sexual or religious groups.
  - Language which is vulgar or offensive.

### HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR SCRIPT

Along with your script, please provide the following information. If the script was written by a group, please provide this information for each writer:

- Full name
- Age
- Gender
- Full address
- Country

Also include a summary of less than 300 words describing your topic and how it affects your community.

### Deadline

Please send your radio script, personal information and plot summary before December 15, 2007 to the Voices of Youth Mailbox: [voy@unicef.org](mailto: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](#)



### BIOGRAPHY

Mazhar Qadri El-Shorbaji is 23-year-old development and peace activist from Cairo, Egypt. Mazhar is the Chairman of the Board of the UN Youth Club in Egypt, and a consultant for Rotaract – Asyout (Rotaract is an international programme founded in 1968 for young men and women ages 18 to 30 who believe they can make a difference). He is also a member in the Youth Development and Peace Network/ World Bank and an active member of Voices of Youth. He has recently joined 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. Mazhar's interests also include reading, listening to classical music and golf.

### ISSUES

Mazhar is involved in voluntary community work in all fields and constantly strives to promote volunteerism within his community. A peace activist and advocate of dialogue with others, he believes that 'Philanthropy is the highest value that gives meaning to our life'. In addition, Mazhar dedicates a lot of his time to the issues of global warming and climate change.

### ACTIVITIES

As president of the UN Youth and Rotaract clubs, Mazhar has succeeded in mobilizing the energy of a large number of young people in his community. He recently took part in celebrating the International Childhood Cancer Day, aimed at helping children with cancer to get the best possible treatment and care, by raising both awareness and money. He also participated with Al-Salam Art Gallery in Cairo in holding an exhibition entitled "A Meeting of Art and Philanthropy". The exhibition, which was the first of its kind in Africa, showed paintings and drawings by child cancer patients. Moreover, in cooperation with Muhab Qadri, Secretary of the UN Youth Club, Mazhar established the Maadi-Monaco Friends Club, which is the first Arab youth society that aims at spreading the culture of peace and dialogue.

With regard to the future, Mazhar says, "I want to become a peace advocate in my country and the whole world. I aspire to obtain a Master's degree in Peace Education." He also aspires to obtain a PhD in International Understanding, which he hopes will help him achieve his objectives.

### CHALLENGES

Mazhar recognizes that climate change is one of the most serious challenges facing the world today. He believes that despite young people's various efforts to protect our planet, there is so much more that needs to be done. In that context, he will soon launch "A Tree Everywhere" initiative, and is working to have the UN endorse an International Day for the Trees of Africa.

### MAZHAR'S MESSAGE TO FUTURE YOUTH LEADERS

"My message is the same as Dr. Albert Schweitzer's, the noble laureate of 1952: 'Wherever a man turns he can find someone who needs him'."