



UNIVERSAL CHILDREN'S DAY

THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Q: What is Universal Children's Day?

A: Universal Children's Day was established by the United Nations General Assembly as a day of celebration of the state of welfare of children.

Officially established on 20 November 1989, Universal Children's Day marks the day on which the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989.

Q: What is the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

A: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international treaty that addresses the rights of children and youth under the age of 18.

The Convention's 54 articles recognises the basic human rights of children and gives them additional rights to protect them from harm. These include their rights to:

- an identity
- healthcare
- education
- shelter
- economic opportunity
- safety
- special protection in times of war

The Convention rests on four foundation principles:

1. non-discrimination (article 2);
2. best interests of the child (article 3);
3. the child's right to life, survival and development (article 6);
4. respect for the views of the child (article 12).

In essence, the Convention demands that every child –regardless of where they are born, the race or ethnic group they belong to, whether they are a boy or girl, rich or poor– must have a full opportunity to become a productive member of society and must have the right to speak up and be heard.

Q: What is the aim of Universal Children's Day?

A: The aim is to put public initiatives and campaigns in place to raise awareness of children's rights worldwide, awareness of their situation in life, problems, wishes, needs and longings as well as to enable exchanges and meetings between them.

Those in positions of political responsibility should, in particular, be reminded that it is very much up to them to act in the interests of children. It is up to them to act in family and social politics with laws that explicitly protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse of all kinds, in educational politics, in measures for ensuring the safety of children in war and conflict situations, etc.

Q: How can young people get involved and respond to Universal Children's Day?

A: Children themselves have a role to play, consistent with their abilities, in order to secure their own rights. The following are some ideas for children

- Organise a National Child Day festival at school. Set up booths with audio or visual presentations on themes such as youth and the family, the participation rights of children and youth, or healthy minds and healthy bodies.
- Create a newsletter on the rights of children and youth. Share the newsletter with the community.
- Make a list of improvements you would like to see for children and youth living in your community. Begin by identifying factors in the community that could improve the health and well being of children and youth. Discuss ways that institutions, organisations and youth themselves can address these factors.
- Organise an essay contest on the Convention on the Rights of the Child in which schoolmates pick a specific right and explain why that right is important to them. Publish the winning essay in the school paper or local community paper.
- Organise and participate in a model parliamentary debate on a right or group of rights featured in the Convention.
- Identify a right or group of rights that children from some parts of the world do not enjoy. Have a discussion on what action you can take to improve the situation.
- Invite speakers from a children's rights organisation to talk about their work and how you can help make a difference.
- View a film on children's rights based on the Convention. Discuss some of the issues raised by the film.

For more information, visit www.unicef.org/malaysia/about_crc.html