



On the Record for Children

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From the AP Editorial Desk

PrepCom Faces Extension as Drafting Stalls by On the Record Staff

As drafting on the draft Outcome document dragged on late into Thursday night, PrepCom delegates were bracing themselves for the probability that they would not finish by Friday evening and speculating about a follow-up before the Special Session.

By late Thursday, the PrepCom had reached consensus on less than 40 of the 58 paragraphs. Even within these paragraphs, there remained disagreement over a range of controversial issues, including child labour, reproductive health care, the role of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the death penalty.

One senior UNICEF official predicted that the PrepCom might succeed in agreeing on 90 percent of the text by Friday. If this were so, it remains unclear how the PrepCom would want to continue the discussion. Some feel that this session should extend into next week, while others

feel it should resume in the form of an Intersessional in two to three weeks. Still others are talking of leaving outstanding issues to the Special Session itself.

Whichever formula is chosen, it could have serious implications for NGOs, since they would not be able to participate and lobby at Intersessionals.

Adding to the confusion, Ambassador Hanns Schumacher from Germany told a briefing of the Child Rights Caucus on Thursday that the Bureau had received three letters from different groups of governments ruling out a resumption of the debate in July, August or September.

Meanwhile, UNICEF officials announced Thursday that up to 250 young people will be invited to participate at a three-day forum in New York prior to the Special Session. The forum will include town hall meetings and theatrical events, as well as orientation on the Special Session. All the young delegates will be chosen by governments.

European Patience Wears Thin by On the Record Staff

European delegations appeared to be losing patience with the United States on Thursday, as the US delegation dug in its heels during the redrafting of the Outcome document.

During a long and tedious day, the United States insisted that the Convention on the Rights of the Child could only serve as the normative basis for the Action Plan for those governments that have ratified it. The United States also insisted on referring to abstinence as a primary way of avoiding sexually transmitted diseases.

The United States also seemed determined to oppose any European attempt to ban the use of the death penalty for crimes committed before the age of 18. Late on Thursday night, European governments were preparing to propose such a ban in the section of the Outcome draft that deals with the general protection of children.

Several European delegates suggested to On the Record that taken together, these three demands showed that the US delegation was overplaying its hand, and making an overall compromise less likely.

On the Convention, conference sources confirmed Thursday's report in On the Record that the United States was prepared to accept that the Convention could be the normative framework for governments which have ratified it. This would exclude the United States.

At the same time, the United States is trying to soften the impact of this by including a reference to other human rights instruments that it finds acceptable, including the CRC's two optional protocols, on sexual exploitation and child soldiers.

Michael Southwick, the head of the US delegation reportedly flew to Washington Thursday to consult with the Senate on the two optional protocols. This is taken as an indication that the Bush administration intends to ratify.

In spite of this, the United States and EU continued to struggle over the precise role that the CRC will play in the Action Plan. The United States proposed changing the wording in paragraph 27 that refers to the Convention and protocols to describe them as 'important standards' rather than 'essential standards' – the current wording. One agitated European delegate described this as a 'very frustrating word debate,' that was at odds with the impression of co-operation that the United States was trying to project.

The United States was equally unrelenting in the paragraphs that refer to reproductive health. Late Wednesday night, at a quarter past midnight, the United States proposed that governments promote 'abstinence' as one example of 'responsible sexual behavior' that will help people avoid 'unwanted or early pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.'

This language – a clear concession to the American right – proved objectionable to some European delegations because abstinence has so little to do with the core issue, namely the health of young women and girls.

'We would not highlight this (abstinence) as a major means of dealing with the problem [of teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS],' said a UK delegate. 'If you list one means of doing something, you end up wanting to list all the means. And I don't think anyone would stomach all the means of avoiding STDs.'

It was noted that the United States received support from none of its usual Catholic allies such as Italy or the Holy See. (Ironically, one of the few governments to support the United States was Libya).

This suggested to many that the US position on 'abstinence' was political rather than religious – and further added to the growing sense that the United States may not, after all, be so ready to compromise at this PrepCom.

The third contentious issue that threatens to divide Europe and the United States is the death penalty.

European delegates said that on their own, each of these American demands might have formed the basis for some kind of compromise. But taken together they were just 'too much.'

Growing Pains for the Global Movement by Sara Friedman

Can there be a happy marriage between a glossy, corporate, hi-tech media campaign and a no frills, grassroots, paper-and-pencil driven movement?

This is one of several nagging questions about the Global Movement for Children (GMC) and the Say Yes for Children Pledge campaign, that are plaguing NGOs.

'Say Yes' is a worldwide pledge drive that has been developed by UNICEF and five of its NGO partners. The pledge drive asks people everywhere to cast their ballot for children by voting on

ten key principles. More than 2.5 million ballots have been cast since the pledge began in April. Pledgers include UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Bill Gates, CEO of Microsoft, and other celebrities.

But it is precisely this sort of celebrity link that sums up some of the nagging doubts that surround the GMC. One group of NGOs from Kenya told On the Record that the 'Say Yes' is too focused on celebrities. 'That's fine, but it has nothing to do with us working on the ground.' Such concerns will no doubt be discussed at a meeting for NGOs on the GMC today at 10 am in the Church Center.

'We wanted the Special Session to be a launch pad for the GMC,' said Dan Seymour, of the International Save the Children Alliance - one of the five NGOs involved in the campaign. 'No outcome document is going to make a difference for children unless the entire world puts pressure on its governments to make it happen.'

On the Record roamed the PrepCom corridors asking NGOs their views on the GMC and its 'Say Yes' campaign. Not surprisingly, NGO responses – on and off the record – ran the gamut from inspired to confused, to irritated.

According to one official from a large Geneva-based NGO, the GMC is not a movement but an 'organizational arrangement' created and directed from New York. 'A movement springs from everywhere, bringing with it passion, persistence, heated debate and diversity,' she said. This is lacking in the GMC until now.

Several young people who attended the PrepCom said they felt 'patronized' and that saying yes for children is an adult action in which children play a minor role. Maria del Rosari and Marcela Raeda are two young women from Peru and Colombia who like the idea of the Say Yes campaign but feel that it gives short shrift to the issues of adolescents, especially in the area of sexual and reproductive health – that is not connected to HIV/AIDS.

Seventeen year old PrepCom delegate from Norway, Lene Richardt who has Cerebral Palsey, was disappointed that disabilities was not one among the 10 pledges. But then she took a moment to stare at the GMC ballot. 'Look, here we are – (where it says) educate every child. Here we are again – stop harming and exploiting children. All we have to do is make ourselves seen as well as heard.'

'UNICEF can't win,' lamented a high-level staff member who works closely with NGOs. She added that when UNICEF first proposed the GMC to NGOs in February 1999, 'they either complained it was too vague or that NGOs were only brought in to climb on the bandwagon that was already rolling.' There's plenty of opportunity for NGOs to own the process, according to this official. 'They just have to pitch in and make it happen.'

Mr. Seymour issued a plea for patience. This effort can't be controlled by four or five or ten organizations, he said. It has to come from the people, but it is still very new. 'Here in New York, we are bending forwards to provide support and information and bending backwards to let go.' This is not easy, he acknowledged.

It is clear that NGO participation in the field has been uneven. Some countries are slow in getting started, but others have hit the ground running. 'The GMC is a great motivator,' says Tanya Barron, Chair of UNICEF/NGO Committee for Children in the CEE CIS Region. In Russia, she said, the Global Movement has inspired hundreds of NGOs 'who have 'NEVER' worked together before' to come up with all kinds of exciting ideas. The internet is proving to be a great mobilizer. One Consultation on the GMC in April brought 150 people from 27 countries. NGOs also joined forces on a one-page open letter to the Berlin Interministerial Conference. Young people formed half the drafting committee, where Serbians and Albanians, Armenians and Azeris worked together through the night without blinking. This was inspired by the Global Movement.

Geoffry Mhagama, 17, has voted in the Say Yes campaign in his school in Malawi. He told On the Record that selecting priorities has made him think more closely about what's really important.

For many NGOs, the main challenge is how to put the GMC into the hands of grassroots communities, children and young people. More than 90 percent of children in developing countries have no computers and no access to the Internet. But they can be reached with a little creativity and innovation, according to Grace Banya, of UNICEF Uganda.

Working with local NGOs, UNICEF in Uganda 'designed a colorful paper ballot, simplified and translated the language, and added a tear sheet for children to take home that says: 'I am happy to be a member of the GMC.'" They also made a cloth strip of 10 panels for signatures from each of the country's 56 districts. With a target of five million votes, the 56 strips will be put together and brought to the Special Session.

'We need to remind ourselves that this is just the beginning,' said Mohan Thazhatu, PLAN International's Regional Director for Latin America. PLAN's first effort at introducing the vote took place in one urban and one rural school in Guatemala. PLAN was surprised by the greater involvement of rural kids who were better prepared and more engaged.

'We went away with many lessons,' he said. 'Bring kids in from the start, don't just give them ballots. Encourage girls to speak up.' But the major challenge, he said, is still to develop mechanisms for follow up and answer the kids when they ask 'what next?' 'Maybe,' he said, 'we should ask them.'

- The GMC and Say Yes Campaign can be found at the UNICEF website.

African Youth Council Formed by Disillusioned Youth by Yvonne Maingey

African youth representatives formed the African Youth Council yesterday in response to a lack of meaningful youth participation at the Africa Caucus on Wednesday. 'We just want to be involved more in matters that concern us,' said 18-year-old Stella Adhiambo.

The youth present felt that they were not being listened to, that the focus was on the adults, and that they were being left out of the main decision-making. The adults present had a very hard time with the questions that were put forward by the children and did not address them all. 'If we children work together instead of focusing on our own problems, we can achieve a lot more,' said an enthusiastic 18-year-old Nusrah Wali.

The new youth council will be made up of under-25 year olds, with two representatives from each of the twelve countries that sent children to the conference. They hope to increase children's participation in pan-African affairs, and to come up with concrete plans for the development of Africa.

The idea for a youth council was first proposed at the Pan-African Forum held in Cairo, in May of this year. While in Cairo, one of the main points that came from the children were that youth parliaments should be established in all countries. 'We do not necessarily want our own Mercedes-Benz or big offices, we just want to be able to work with our governments so that children's opinions are taken into consideration,' said one of the new council members.

Anyone in doubt of the power of youth only needs to look as far as this new council and the kids at this conference. They are changing the world, and it's happening fast. Governments take heed: use this power for the good of all our societies.

Rebuilding the NGO Committee

The smooth and successful involvement of NGOs at the PrepCom did not happen by itself. It took a lot of hard work by the Steering Committee of the NGO Committee on UNICEF.

Currently based in New York and Geneva, the NGO Committee has 134 member NGOs, of which 12 sit on the Steering Committee. It is their persistence and attention to detail that have brought you the NGO Consultation, 70 side events, daily briefings, translations, and NGO plenary interventions. The Steering Committee has acted as a NGO troubleshooter during the PrepCom. It has also produced your daily newspaper: 'On the Record.'

Founded in 1952, the NGO Committee on UNICEF has been working with UNICEF for nearly fifty years. Those fifty years of advocacy, organizing events, and addressing policy issues have smoothed the way for its successful work at the Special Session preparation process.

'Now we are at a turning point,' said Michelle Poulton, Acting President of the larger NGO Committee. NGOs don't talk with one voice. They need a forum in which they can discuss, debate, cross-fertilize and reach consensus.' The Committee, she said, provides such a forum.

The NGO Committee is going through a major restructuring. Instead of downsizing, belt-tightening and layoffs, it is expanding with the potential to include representation from NGOs in every country. By November 2001, it hopes to have a new structure in place that will include a global forum made up of nine regional representatives and six international NGO members.

The new structure will be built from the ground up. As a start, NGOs working for child rights will come together at the national level and create a national forum. If one already exists, so much the better. A Regional forum will then be set up in each of the nine regions where UNICEF works. Each Regional forum will be composed of representatives elected by the national for a. The final stage will involve a 15-member global forum represented by members of the nine regions and the six international members.

The Committee is proceeding one step at a time to make the process inclusive, according to Bani Dugal, of the Baha'I Internationa Community. 'There will, of course, be growing pains, she says. 'It will sometimes be disorganized, inefficient and frustrating. But that is a fair price for real participation and ownership.'

For UNICEF this is a 'delightful development' said Margaret Kyenkya-Isabirye, Senior Advisor in the Gender Partnerships and Programming Section of UNICEF. 'It will further strengthen our relationship with the NGO Committee and even our own work in the field.' When the governments decided to invite all UNICEF NGO partners to the Special Session process, that number added up to 3600. 'I hope that all 3600 become members of the NGO Committee on UNICEF,' said Ms. Isabirye.

US Says Beijing and Cairo References Must Come Out by On the Record Staff

The US delegation has proposed that the draft Outcome document should make no reference to the decisions of the Cairo and Beijing conferences on reproductive health care.

The US proposal was made during a debate on the highly controversial paragraph 33 of the draft, which was discussed on Thursday in a closed session of a special working group. The group was facilitated by Liechtenstein, the Philippines and Egypt.

As of late afternoon, the group was still studying a compromise proposal to drop a reference to 'affordable, quality reproductive health care and services, as agreed at the International Conference on Population and Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women.'

If the final Outcome document contains no reference to Cairo and Beijing it will confirm the worst fears of progressive NGOs. They fear the Bush Administration plans to use the Special Session to turn the clock back on international agreements that seek to make family planning and reproductive health care more accessible to women and girls.

'We can't look back to other language,' said the US delegate during discussion on that part of paragraph 33.

The closed door debate on Thursday also produced several more potentially explosive decisions. In another part of paragraph 33, delegates agreed to put brackets around the 'right' of adolescents to basic health care, as well as sexual and reproductive 'services.' Both of these additions, if accepted, would also weaken the language of Cairo and Beijing.

In another damaging decision, delegates have added language that would place any policy on reproductive health care within the context of 'national laws and regulations and cultural values and religious beliefs.' This new language could leave it up to religious conservatives to decide whether adolescents have access to reproductive services. It was still being studied when On the Record went to press.

If this language is adopted it will represent a major defeat for the European Union, Switzerland and the Rio Group, all of which emphasize the need to reaffirm the language of Cairo and Beijing. 'We will not go below Beijing +5 language, which has a clear definition of reproductive health care and services. We don't want to reinvent the wheel,' stated the EU delegate.

But the US disagreed. 'We are not talking about women. We are talking about children,' said the US delegate.

The US also objected to wording in a new paragraph on child health care and survival proposed by Switzerland and the Rio Group, which pays 'particular attention to eliminating the pattern of preventable mortality among girl infants and children.' The US delegate stated that the mortality rate is higher among boys than girls, and that referring to 'preventable mortality' is questionable language, in theory all mortality should be preventable.

This disregards research that has found a higher mortality rate for girl children as a result of femicide (abortion of girl fetuses), infanticide, neglect and unequal medical care.

Death Penalty Clash Looms by Rachel Watson

The United States and Australia were expected to object late Thursday to an EU proposal that would protect children from corporal and capital punishment.

As On the Record went to press, the EU was reportedly planning to expand a paragraph on the protection of children from protection against 'torture and other forms of inhuman treatment,' to include specifically corporal punishment and the death penalty. They will also propose language ruling out the use of life imprisonment without the possibility of release.

Similar references had been inserted by the EU in previous drafts of the document, but taken out at the demand of governments that retain the death penalty and corporal punishment.

The United States objected to language that sought to protect children from the death penalty and life imprisonment. While the United States does not execute anyone under the age of 18, it does execute prisoners who committed crimes while still minors.

One European delegate pointed out that the US would probably find itself very much alone if it objected to the EU position. 'This isn't about outlawing the death penalty,' she said. 'The US will find it very hard to defend the death penalty in this context.'

EU delegates were also planning to reinsert references to corporal punishment, consistent with their belief that every child has the right to avoid violence in whatever form.

'If you beat up children how can you say that you respect their rights?' said Sweden's Ambassador Thomas Hammarberg, who also serves as the EU coordinator. 'If you ask children, they say if you beat them up and abuse them, you have the power to prevent them from expressing themselves. That's what corporal punishment is about.'

Australia was among the governments that insisted on removing corporal punishment from previous drafts. 'We still have concerns in that corporal punishment means different things to different countries,' said one Australian delegate Thursday night before the EU language was put forward. 'Some Australian jurisdictions retain the use of corporal punishment. It may be inconsistent with the use of corporal punishment at home and in schools.'

Over-18s Feel Excluded From Outcome Document **by Nazli Kfoury**

On Thursday, the members of the Advocates for Youth submitted a draft of a child participation document to the Bureau for inclusion in the Outcome Document.

In their document, they wrote: As young adults, ages 18 and over, we bridge the gap between children and adults. We represent and work for the best interests of young people and children. We were children not so long ago, and are adults in transition – uniquely qualified to advocate on children's issues.

A member of the Advocacy group, Nandi Msezane, a 20 year-old from South Africa stated, 'As young adults, we are better suited to represent children because we understand them and their concerns better than adults in the government could.'

South Korea's Passive Behavior **by Lim Jae Hong**

Korean youth are concerned that their government is all talk and no action when it comes to children's rights. Because of the culture that accepts adult condescension toward children, they are afraid that the Outcome document will be nothing more than wasted paper in Korea.

One of the reasons for their skepticism is Korea's lack of participation at the East Asian forums that have taken place over the last few months. The official reason given for this lack of attendance is that Korea has a different set of national priorities than its neighbors, thereby making its attendance a moot point.

The government delegate Kyung Sook Lee said, 'The issues that we wish to voice are different from the ones of other East Asian countries. The issues discussed [now] are mainly on malnutrition, child labor and sexual exploitation. In Korea, we have solved such problems and we wish to focus on problems we have now such as education, school violence and problems arising from the wide use of Internet.'

The youth representatives attending the third PrepCom met with the Korean delegates to discuss their concerns over the government's passive behavior, and voiced their opinions on the passive stance of the Korean government regarding children's rights. They stressed the importance of actually listening to children and applying their ideas in decisions concerning them.

Unfortunately, Ms. Lee noted that because of the cultural barriers surrounding youth participation within Korea, young people have very little experience in attending and debating issues at either the national or the international level. It does not appear from her comments that there will be any participation from the youth in the near future.

Profile: Rebuilding Serbia - The Role of Children

Peter Lippman talks to Vesna Dejanovic, from the Yugoslav Child Rights Center, about her work in helping Yugoslavia's children to recover from a decade of war.

When you talk to Vesna Dejanovic, you get the feeling that violations of children's rights will one day cease. Her Belgrade-based organization has an inspiring program for the promotion of children's involvement in matters that affect them, and she wants to use this special moment in the history of Serbia to push for the respect that child rights deserves.

Vesna Dejanovic is a psychologist and Information Sector Coordinator for the Yugoslav Child Rights Centre. She talked about the work of her organization to On the Record, and called for more explicit language in the Outcome document regarding participation. Youth representatives Miki Grkovic and Jovan Kaurin, both 16, added comments about their personal experiences as adolescents in Serbia.

In the upheaval of the last decade, Yugoslav children have suffered; in Jovan Kaurin's words, 'Children, who contributed the least to the crisis in the first place, bear the brunt of all the problems.' Ms. Dejanovic describes the ongoing challenge of living with the combined effects of war, sanctions, and poverty. Where there was once a state-run health and welfare system and a high-quality educational system, precious little remains; Serbian industry is all but non-existent.

Thus in this post-war period, as Ms. Dejanovic explains, poverty is the main problem. The average monthly income is less than \$40, and at least a million people (out of ten million) are living below the poverty line. Serbia is now home to almost a million refugees and displaced persons from Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Somewhere between 5,000 and 9,000 children in Serbia are without parents or guardians.

Several populations of children – minorities, the disabled, and refugees – experience discrimination in many ways. Roma (gypsies) and the disabled are taught in segregated facilities. Schools and other public buildings lack any special access for the disabled. Ms. Dejanovic described a complete absence of awareness regarding the disabled.

The poor condition of the educational infrastructure exemplifies the obstacles to a normal childhood for Serbs. Ms. Dejanovic noted that around two-thirds of Serbia's school buildings lack a decent restroom, with water supply and doors often missing. Worse, since 1993, not one

school year has passed without an interruption, whether because of teacher strikes, lack of heating, or the NATO bombardment of 1999. So practically a whole school generation has missed out on the chance to have a normal education.

Miki Grkovic describes his school: 'There are no laboratories in the school now, no equipment, no restrooms. Our professors, because of their low pay, are not motivated. For example, math professors come to class and tell the students to read their books, to memorize the lessons. There is not much interaction between the students and teachers, so that whole relationship is lost.'

Jovan Kaurin said, 'At the same time, we have some brilliant professors who know very much. But because they aren't paid very well, they lack motivation.' He summed up the experience of Serbian children thus: 'A child of ten years has not had one day of normal life, and so doesn't have a clear view of life.'

An Agenda for the Future, Made by Children

After the years of war and repression, finally an opening has now arrived that is allowing Serbian advocacy organizations greater freedom to work. Ms. Dejanovic says, 'Now we are breathing a little bit easier. Finally, there is freedom of speech, and things have begun in a more positive direction. The government is more open, and it is calling upon NGOs.'

Founded in 1997, the Yugoslav Child Rights Centre is involved in education and research regarding the rights of children. Ms. Dejanovic: 'Our role is to try to help children be part of the political agenda, to do serious work, not to be a token fixture.' Ms. Dejanovic is hopeful that this moment of political opening in Serbia can be used to make the theme of children's rights more prominent.

The Centre conducted a detailed survey of children's opinions, as Ms. Dejanovic described it, 'on the rights of the child, how they see their lives now, how they experience poverty, how they think of education and the health system, the right to play, and discrimination. We encouraged them to think of priorities for the future, what is most important, things policy-makers should think of, and how to do it, what steps to take.'

This research included 750 children throughout Yugoslavia, including marginalized children – disabled, parentless, minorities, refugees and displaced persons, and children in conflict with the law. Ms. Dejanovic described the results as 'an agenda for the future, made by children.'

Answers to the survey included proposals that the school curriculum be reformed; that methods of teaching be improved; that a student assembly be formed where teachers and students can collaborate; and that a special court be established to deal with violations of children's rights.

The Yugoslav Child Rights Centre drafted a plan of action based on a list of priorities from the survey. 'We explicitly said that children have to be heard, that they should influence the curriculum, and that they need a complaint mechanism...We will use the results as a lobbying tool on the policy level, to help government understand that they should work to create a world not for children, but with children,' said Ms. Dejanovic.

As a psychologist, Ms. Dejanovic considers that participation is very important for children's social development. 'If there is no preparation, then at age 15, what can a child be prepared to do? They must be involved. So we shouldn't just say, 'Oh, just be quiet, little kid.' Children come to school, sit, listen, get their grades, and they don't have the chance to say, 'That's boring, sorry, I don't agree.'

Besides lobbying and research, the Yugoslav Child Rights Centre works directly with adolescent children, holding summer and winter camps on child rights. 'We encourage them to take initiative in their own setting – helping them to be aware that they are holders of rights, not just the object but a subject of child rights implementation.'

In addition to working to improve treatment of children, the Child Rights Center works on non-violent communication. 'We must help the current generation of young people to understand that people of other ethnicities are still people,' says Ms. Dejanovic. Jovan Kaurin and Miki Grkovic have assimilated this lesson, or perhaps never forgotten it. Miki is a refugee from Kosovo, but he told the Advocacy Project that he gets along very well with the Albanians who have come to the PrepCom as youth representatives from Kosovo.

Starting the New Millenium Right

Ms. Dejanovic considers it a positive thing 'that in the third millennium we are starting with such an important event about children.' She expects that in several years there will be measurable results from the effort of the Special Session on Children.

While she considers the latest version of the Outcome document an improvement over earlier versions, Ms. Dejanovic feels that provisions for child rights should be more explicitly based on a child rights approach – 'more obligatory, stronger.' She is dissatisfied by a lack of language about children's participation in families, school, and administrative proceedings.

Jovan Kaurin summed up his hopes for results at this PrepCom. Speaking of the war-related ills described above, he said, 'We are struggling for this kind of thing to happen as little as possible. Our mission is to attract the attention of the whole world, and our wish, on the basis of our experience, is to make a better world for all children.'

Profile: Mahfuza Aktei, Bangladesh - 'Time to Speak Out'

Sixteen year-old Mahfuza Aktei from Bangladesh has been elected by a group of 550 children, 10 to 18 years of age, to represent them at the third PrepCom. 'I will do my best to represent them and the problems in my country,' she says.

She represents a diverse smattering of the best and worst Bangladesh has to offer its young people. They come from urban and rural areas. They are street and working children, indigenous, and disabled. Some of them are in school and some are not.

Mahfuza is one of several young Bangladeshis who were chosen by Bangladeshi NGOs to prepare a comment on the Outcome document. Their alternative report 'At a Glance,' written last month, is a powerful reminder of the issues facing children in Bangladesh.

Mahfuza graduated from school last year and recently completed a 6-month course in leather handbag making from the Underprivileged Children's Education Program (UCEP) in the capital city of Dhaka. She wants to open her own training center for poor kids.

Hers is a success story about how the youth training programs in Bangladesh developed over the last ten years are working. 'Since I have been involved with UCEP I have a lot of contact with other kids. Now I have more courage and I can speak out,' says Mahfuza.

UCEP offers basic education and vocational training for poor kids. 'I like UCEP because the children are all poor and disabled. These children don't have any other opportunities, especially those with disabilities,' says Mahfuza.

Although you can't tell by looking at her, Mahfuza is blind in her right eye. But she says, 'I am not disabled because I can work and eat. I don't have a problem. But I don't like to tell people that I am blind because they would treat me differently.'

Her family was homeless and came from a slum area in Dhaka. '14 years ago my father died,' says Mahfuza, who has an older and younger sister. 'After that my mother started selling saris.' (Saris are the traditional silken wraps common to South-east Asia). 'But I am poor because I don't have a father or any brothers, and my mother has no work.'

Mahfuza is currently working at UCEP thanks to a state-sponsored program developed particularly for poor children, especially girls. Roksana Khoudker, and one of Mahfuza's chaperones, says, 'the situation is slowly changing and in some areas, more girls than boys are getting an education. Programs like UCEP provide scholarships and training opportunities so kids can learn a trade. Right now there are 20 million people in Bangladesh – and 48 percent are under 14. Most of them have few opportunities.'

'My country is very poor,' says Mahfuza, 'all children don't have the same opportunities because most are poor and have to work instead of going to school. Many have risky jobs as electricians, or in drilling and construction. Some drive tricycles hauling people and stuff. And many live on the street.'

Another chaperone, Ms. Lulu Haque, manages a program for Poor and Working Children with Save the Children in Dhaka and has worked on development issues in her country for twenty years. 'I am disappointed that there is only one reference to street children in the document. Life is the hardest for these children.'

Some of the worst abuses are committed against street children and are highlighted in the children's alternative report At a Glance. 'Street children are paid by politicians to agitate at political demonstrations. They hurl explosive devices that they've made into the crowd. They are

hired because they are small and quick and hard to catch. And plenty of them are suffering,' says Lulu.

Other issues identified in the report are grouped under the headings: health, education, violence and exploitation, and HIV/AIDS. Ranking high on the children's list are problems like arsenic in the water, dengue fever, and food being unevenly distributed towards government officials, corporal punishment, sexual abuse and imprisonment.

'It is very common in Bangladesh for police to take poor kids off the street. They put these children in prison and often leave them there. Sometimes they stay in prison for five, six, even 10 years,' stresses Lulu.

Over the last decade, dozens of garment factories producing clothing for mainly European markets, have cropped up near the major cities, says Roksana. 'Economic change is good because we have a lot of poverty, but people aren't aware of the negative effects of this change like trafficking and child prostitution.' She cites the mass migrations of young people looking for work in the cities.

'Only about 30 to 40 percent of the children looking for work in these factories find it. The rest are extremely vulnerable because they don't have the security of the rural areas where family and friends look out for them,' says Roksana.

Last year, the Kahn Foundation in Bangladesh did a study on the sexual and reproductive health of girl adolescents in Dhaka. During that year, researchers found huge numbers of children coming into the city areas, and expanded the study to track the numbers. 'Their findings revealed that about 1,000 adolescent girls migrate into Dhaka daily. Of this number there are many who will wind up on the streets or worse.'

Mahfuza is clearly aware of the huge opportunity she has been given. 'I am very happy to be here because this is a meeting where children can speak and adults are listening,' says Mahfuza, who will return home to speak to children at meetings being organized by UCEP and other youth groups. 'I will try my best to talk about our problems in Bangladesh. It is time to speak out.'

From the Foundation Up to the Roof by Jovan Kaurin

A Brief History Of A Long Journey: Zrenjanin - Belgrade - Budapest - New York

The wheels began to turn one day during a debate with my teacher on the quality of education. Over the past ten years, education in my country has been in a serious crisis. My attempt to draw attention to overly ambitious school curricula, lack of efficiency, out-dated teaching methods and dire learning conditions was quite successful! My teacher saw in me someone capable of struggling for children's rights.

I was invited to visit the Community Children's Centre, 'Mastaliste' (Dreamland), in my hometown of Zrenjanin, where I learned about the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Then I

was invited to attend a National Consultation in Belgrade with 20 young people from all over the country. We were asked to define problems and priorities for young people from our perspective.

I was just another ordinary kid, with similar views to other young people in Yugoslavia. But participating in this process with other young people without the interference of adults awoke in me a completely new urge: to fight for the rights of youth!

The past ten years have been difficult for young people in my country. Due to various armed conflicts and political troubles, we have been isolated from the rest of the world. In Belgrade, we all woke up and made a first step along the long journey toward creating opportunities for new generations that we ourselves have missed.

I was selected by my peers in Belgrade to represent them at the Regional Consultation in Budapest. Visiting Budapest, that beautiful big city, was a precious opportunity. I met many young people from across Europe and Central Asia, and saw the large and expensive shops, fancy cars and monumental old buildings. These were glorious moments for me.

I simply adore travelling. When I travel, I don't have time to think about the wars, poverty, deterioration of social systems and the darkness that has engulfed children in our country over the past decade.

Perhaps it is a kind of cynical for me to have a good time while kids back home are rummaging through garbage bins trying to find some food. However, in order to make changes, one sometimes needs to escape everyday reality, at least for a brief moment, to focus completely on the matters at hand.

Filled with freshness and loads of positive vibrations, I dove into the child rights arena and the discussions about discrimination, violence and abuse. Lacking respect for the present and future of the world, some nasty people are neglecting the opinions, needs and goals of children. My experiences have encouraged me to stand up firmly in front of the big shots in business suits, and to speak out loudly and clearly: 'We have the right to life, the right to be what we are.'

Budapest was a decisive moment: I gained the confidence of my peers and pals, but also those serious adults in suits, and was chosen to represent our consultation. As you can guess, that meant I was asked to attend this Prepcom in New York!

You have no idea how excited I was when I learned that I would be flying in an airplane for the first time in my life. And that I would get to stroll around Manhattan, watch guys play basketball on the streets behind high wire fences, and look at the Statue of Liberty which I had seen in a Michael Jackson video!

I am honored to be here preparing for the Special Session on Children. We have arrived at the very roof of the house inhabited by those who struggle for children's rights! We have been invited to enter this space and to share opinions with other young people from around the world who are trying to make it a new and better place.

This small step can achieve a lot, but by no means everything. We are involved in a major battle to create a better world for children that has been going on for the past eleven years. We have to win this battle, or else...

- Jovan Kaurin, 16, is from Zrenjanin, Serbia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Child Trafficking in Nigeria by Ying Ying Zeng

Child trafficking in Nigeria is increasing at alarming rates, stated the panel on 'Child Trafficking/Child Labor in Nigeria' on Wednesday. Advocates on the panel said that 'there is no social or legal child's protection' available to these children.

Trafficking has severe effects on a child's mental, emotional, and physical growth. These children suffer from malnutrition and growth deficits; early deaths among trafficked children are also common. Abuses, including being locked in refrigerators, working long hours without a break, and consistent exposure to criminal activities, lead to children who themselves become traffickers in adulthood.

Poverty in Nigeria is the primary cause of this practice. Seventeen million people live below the poverty line, and many parents cannot afford to support their families on salaries of two dollars per day. Other causes included, 'a weak capacity of supporting institutions, a lack of programming and resources, and lack of policy support,' according to Naomi Akpan, Program Officer of The Constitutional Rights Project.

Children living in rural areas are the most likely to be sold into 'modernized slavery,' by parents who are unaware of where their children are going. Instead of humane, respectable jobs, these youths are forced to work in household service, prostitution and manual labor.

The Nigerian government has claimed that it is setting up programs to make people more aware of the situation and training children in trade skills. A social security system for unemployed parents will be introduced in the future to prevent the need to sell their children. The local NGOs have already implemented some programs to 'empower the people, mobilize political will, and establish awareness [of child trafficking],' noted Tewo Bakare of the Association for Education and Empowerment.

CRIN Hard at Work by John Meyers

In the mass of acronyms that makes up a United Nations conference there is one acronym everyone should know about: CRIN. CRIN stands for the Child Rights Information Network, which is an organization that spreads information to people who work for children's rights. Members of CRIN are here at the 3rd PrepCom to get the word out about children's rights.

CRIN spreads information in four different ways. These four ways are by posting a website, distributing an e-mail update (called CRIN Mail), distributing a regional program and publishing a newsletter (called CRIN News).

In their work CRIN focuses on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The document gives children certain rights throughout the nations that have signed the document. This document is also the true purpose of this week.

'What I like the most out of working on child's rights is that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is one of the most ambitious treaties on human rights,' says Andrea Khan, coordinator of CRIN.

CRIN works with three goals in mind. One goal is to 'support and promote the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child at national and international levels.' Another goal is to 'contribute to satisfying the varied information needs of organizations and individuals working for child rights at the grassroots, regional, national and international levels.' The last goal CRIN has is to 'support child rights organizations in their own endeavor to develop information systems and methods of information exchange, using both electronic and non-electronic networking tools.' Andrea also told On the Record why the CRC document is so unique. 'There are three main reasons why this document is different than any other. The first reason is that there are all the possible rights a child could have (social, economic, political, cultural and civil rights). The second reason is that NGOs participate in making sure that the agreement by the nations is fulfilled. The last reason is that children also have the right to participate in making sure the agreement is fulfilled.

In wrapping up the conversation, Andrea released a little known fact to On the Record. 'Germany is exploring a proposal for an amendment to this convention saying that individual people can complain that their rights have been violated to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.'

- For more information on CRIN visit their website or e-mail.

Algerian Delegation 'Will Include Children' by Jeremy Weissman

The Algerian government delegation to the Special Session will include children, Algerian diplomats told On the Record yesterday. The number of children will be determined once Algeria has received official invitations from the United Nations, according to Larbi Djacta, counselor to the Algerian mission.

The commitment from Algeria came after a PrepCom working group reached consensus on arrangements for including six young delegates in three round table discussions at the session. This will now be put to the plenary for adoption.

Algeria had asked Wednesday if the children participating in the round table would prepare their own statements. Ms. Samah received assurance from the working group chairperson, German Ambassador Hanns Schumacher, that the children would represent their own views.

Ms. Samah told On the Record that she hoped the selection process for the children would 'be as transparent as possible, in order to avoid any misunderstanding.'

Growing Up Under the Shadow of the Gun by Tariq Jawaid Alam

The mother in a remote Afghan village had anything but concern on her face when the local Imam took away her ten and twelve year olds to spend a lifetime in the service of God. She felt they would be given the proper instruction that she could not manage to give – there were six more hungry ones to take care of and the money she got from the Imam would go a long way to assuage that hunger. At least those two wouldn't worry her.

She would not even see them again. They had been picked up to serve the men fighting the war in Afghanistan. These two, like the hundreds of others would serve either as combatants, for landmine detection, for setting homes on fire, for smuggling arms, as household slaves to officers and/or to fulfill the sexual desires of all men.

According to World Vision International, 'at least 30,000 children under the age of 18 are currently fighting and dying in 36 armed conflicts in various African countries, across Asia and in parts of Europe and South America.'

This alarming figure is just a rough estimate of the adolescents that voluntarily or involuntarily fight an unknown enemy. What is more alarming is the number of children that are not involved directly in conflict but suffer because of it. In Kashmir, young boys are killed and young girls raped by hostile forces, every day. Around seven children are killed by landmines in Afghanistan per day, their small bodies unable to withstand the explosion. In Liberia, children as young as seven are found in combat – in East Timor they are leading armies.