



On the Record for Children

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From the AP Editorial Desk

From Our Readers

From Lee Yoke Lee (Malaysia)

Young People Must Take the Initiative

I used to feel angry at the injustice of society and how we are destroying our environment. I was angry because I thought I could not do anything about the problems. I learned that by speaking up and taking the initiative to be involved, things can become hopeful.

At the International Family Conference held in Kuala Lumpur in October 2001, youth participants were given the opportunity to speak to an audience of adults during a presentation of the Youth Roundtable session. They spoke their opinions on family life, education and other social issues such as HIV/AIDS, sexuality education and gender equality amidst applause and nods of approval of the adults.

If I were able to address the world leaders at the UN Special Session, I would like to remind them to include young people in their plans for making the world a better place, not just by physical presence but through two-way communication. Conversely, young people must have the initiative, knowledge and skills to be taken seriously.

- Lee Yoke Lee, 24, will be attending the UN Special Session on Children.

In the News:

U.S. Will Not Oppose References to Child Rights Convention in Outcome Document

Representatives of the US delegation to the Special Session on Children have informed NGOs that the United States will not oppose references to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in the Outcome Document if states are not required to adopt the CRC. Neither the US nor Somalia have ratified the Convention.

The announcement, made at a briefing for approximately 75 NGOs on April 18, appears to mark a change in the Bush Administration's stance towards the Convention. In past Outcome Document negotiations, the Bush Administration lobbied for a removal of any references to the Convention.

'At least the administration is cognisant of the influence of the CRC and is not denying its importance for other governments,' says Cris Revaz of the American Bar Association. 'I remain hopeful that in the future we in the NGO community can find common ground with this Administration. We believe it exists.'

Meanwhile, 43 US-based NGOs have signed on to a letter to the Bush Administration, urging the United States to support the spirit of the Special Session. The letter asks the Administration to address child poverty at home and the "critical" situation of children abroad. It also asks the United States to support a child rights focus in the Outcome document, and makes a strong statement about the Bush Administration's reluctance to accept existing language concerning reproductive rights.

In the letter, NGOs request that the United States agree to previously accepted language adopted at the Cairo conference on population and development, the Beijing women's conference, the five-year reviews for each of these conferences, and the June 2001 HIV/AIDS meeting of the UN General Assembly. These meetings all endorsed the concept of 'reproductive services,' without opposition from the US administration at the time.

The Bush Administration, however, has made it clear that it views the references to 'reproductive services' in the Cairo and Beijing action plans as being an endorsement of abortion. The April 18 briefing was told that the United States would reject any overt or implied endorsement of abortion in the outcome document for the Special Session.

And despite US assurances to the international community about references to the CRC, the US delegation has been firmly resisting what most NGOs and governments consider an appropriate reference to the Convention as the primary guarantor of children's rights around the world.

The briefing was given by Jackie Sanders, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, along with representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The US delegation will be led by Tommy Thompson, HHS Secretary and will include Andrew Natsios, director of USAID. Two children will join the delegation, which has not yet been finalized.

'The tone of this briefing was much more respectful than the one held during last year's PrepComs,' says Jill Christianson of the National Education Association. 'We were impressed. It was a positive meeting.'

US officials want a reference to the importance of parents and families in the Outcome document, as they are concerned that the document allows too much government involvement in rearing children. Officials also said they would insist that abstinence be mentioned in the Outcome document. They also supported strong language prohibiting child labor and exploitation, in line with Convention 182 of the International Labor Organization.

The briefing was told that the Bush Administration was opposed to the juvenile justice provisions in the CRC, especially the prohibition of the death penalty for adolescents. Officials argued that beyond a disagreement on principle, the treatment of juvenile offenders in the United States varies by state, and that President Bush would not mandate a standard national policy.

The US officials stated that they were now more comfortable with the new version of the Outcome Document. They also agreed to meet with US-based NGOs every day during the Special Session and once in late May as a follow-up to the summit.

US officials also reported that they are urging the US Congress to ratify the two Optional Protocols to the CRC in time for the Special Session, and that the Bush Administration is also pushing for the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

This, says Revaz, comes out of the Administration's support for women's rights in Afghanistan. 'Continuing to oppose a ratification hearing for CEDAW would make the Administration seem hypocritical given its support for the rights of Afghan women,' says Revaz.

The briefing also heard that the United States is committed to supporting initial gives that promote child protection and survival, help AIDS orphans, improve basic child nutrition world-wide, and improve infrastructure in developing countries.

'We were very pleased that the Administration arranged this meeting,' says Nancy Nye, from Youth Advocates International in Washington, DC. 'The US delegation has committed to keeping lines of communication open with NGOs. This briefing has shown us that that can mean a healthy exchange.'

NGO Commitment Chart Will Hold Governments and Civil Society Accountable For Their Actions on Behalf of Children

By Sara Ann Friedman

The NGO Committee on UNICEF is planning to hold governments to account for their policies and programs on children by producing a 'commitment chart' that will be displayed throughout the Special Session.

The chart will list commitments to children by individual governments and will be projected on a wall in the 'Neck' area of the UN basement where many of the Conference meetings will be taking place. It will run continuously and be regularly updated as new commitments are made. Commitments will be collected from public statements made by government and NGO delegates and then posted on the chart.

'Seeing each other's names in lights may just spur governments to out-do their neighbours,' said Mary Diaz, one of the two co-chairs of a steering group that coordinates the Committee's policy on the Special Session. 'Competing seems to be in their nature, and making commitments to children is something governments should be competing about.'

NGOs hope that the chart will also serve as an ongoing and useful post-UNGASS monitoring tool. They also plan to monitor National Plans of Action.

'It is time for governments to stop arguing, backtracking and fine-tuning,' said Mary Purcell, the other co-chair of the NGO Steering Group, 'and high time they take action.'

At the same time, this is not only about governments, said Purcell. 'As NGOs we also need to do more than complain about their failure to act. We need to make our own commitments, and so does every other constituency that cares about children.'

As a result, commitments from NGOs, UN agencies, parliamentarians, mayors, religious leaders, the private sector and other partners will also be included on the chart.

- If your NGO has made or plans to make a specific commitment, please notify the NGO Committee.

New Alternative Outcome Document Released by Child Rights Caucus

On April 19, the Child Rights Caucus released a new version of the alternative Outcome document, in response to the recent changes made in the official document.

The new alternative text includes much stronger and unequivocal references to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It says the Convention 'constitutes the key framework for the realization of children's rights' and calls on all state parties to fully implement the CRC.

The alternative text also calls on states to reverse the negative consequences of globalization, including youth unemployment and the reduction in spending for public services.

Several new proactive goals have also been added. For instance, the document calls for research and analysis of the impact of legislation, policies and resource allocation on children.

Strong pro-choice language was also included in the new alternative text, and all references to the cultural relativity of sexual practices have been deleted. Stronger language concerning the minimum age for soldiers was added, as were more stringent guidelines for preventing child labor.

- To view a copy of the alternative outcome document visit [here](#).
- To join the Child Rights Caucus or get more information, visit [here](#).

UN Representative on Children and Armed Conflict Appoints Civil Society Liaison Officer

Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, has appointed a new Liaison Officer for NGOs, Civil Society and Youth.

'Partnerships with NGOs, civil society and youth organizations are a huge priority for Mr. Otunnu,' says Michelle Morris, the new official. 'My position is focused on developing follow-up and feedback from local, regional and international NGOs. Mr. Otunnu already meets with a wide range of civil society actors during his trips. We're trying to make sure that these people stay engaged in children's issues after a visit has taken place and especially when it's time to implement recommended plans of action.'

'We are trying to engage many different constituencies in this effort,' says Morris. 'Women's groups, communities of faith and youth groups all play a central and vital role in the fight to protect children in the midst of conflict.'

Morris hopes to set up an NGO Consultative Group in Otunnu's office, and working on a project to translate relevant UN resolutions and other international norms into meaningful advocacy tools for grassroots activists. She will also help the Special Representative's office to facilitate meetings between civil society actors and the Security Council, such as the briefing by former child soldiers from Sierra Leone that took place last year.

Morris hopes to involve a number of NGOs and young people in dialogues with Otunnu. On the first day of the Special Session, Otunnu will conduct an interactive meeting with children from war-affected countries. Graca Machel is also scheduled to be present at this intergenerational dialogue.

A 'hands-on' workshop with NGOs has also been scheduled for the final morning of the Special Session. The interactive workshop has been tentatively titled 'Children and Armed Conflict: New Avenues for NGO Advocacy and Monitoring.' The event will seek to actively involve NGOs in a conversation about best practices at the grassroots level and will enable participants to share information about treaties, resolutions and key resource persons.

- For more information, contact Michelle Morris by phone (212) 963-4680 or email.

Regional Parliamentary Networks Issue Statement for Special Session

Parliamentary networks in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, the Americas and Europe have issued a statement calling for the protection of the sexual and reproductive rights of young people.

The networks, which all focus on issues of population and development, have begun circulating the Joint Declaration among their constituencies in an effort to raise awareness about the role of parliamentarians in advance of the May Special Session on Children. The Declaration will be available as an advocacy tool during the Special Session.

The Declaration calls on citizens and legislators to renew their commitments to reproductive rights for all. 'As elected representatives of the people, Parliamentarians have a legitimate role in making the voice of the people heard and speaking for the 'voiceless' at the national and international levels. Parliamentarians carry on the tremendous responsibility of safeguarding the integrity and implementation of hard-won international agreements,' says the Declaration.

The Declaration points out that of the one billion young people worldwide, at least 28 percent are sexually active in any given country and that all young people have the right to information and services that protect them from sexually transmitted diseases and infections, maternal mortality, sexual violence, and early marriage.

- For more information contact Giselle Carino of the Inter-American Parliamentary Group on Population and Development in New York by phone at (212) 214-0220 or via email.

African NGOs Agree on Draft Plan of Action

Members of the African NGO Caucus have met in Mombasa, Kenya to affirm their commitment to a pan-regional action plan as a follow-up to the Special Session.

The action plan will have five themes, each with a different focal point throughout the region. One thematic group, based in Dakar, Senegal, will deal with basic education. Another thematic group will focus on HIV/AIDS from South Africa. A group dealing with child labor will be based in Senegal. A group concentrating on the problem of child trafficking will work from Mali. And a final thematic group focused on the needs and challenges of children in conflict zones will operate out of Sierra Leone.

African NGOs will meet in New York on May 4, just before the Special Session, to finalize their regional Plan of Action. Dr. Moussa Sissoko of the Mali Coalition for the Rights of the Child is the interim chair of the African regional office of the NGO Committee and expects to have regional-and many national-fora of the NGO Committee in place by July.

- For more information on the African NGO Caucus contact Dr. Sissoko via phone in Senegal at (223) 24-2201 or email.

Street Children of India Come Alive in 'Web Profile' of the Global Movement for Children

A new 'web profile' of the Global Movement for Children (GMC) in India can be found on the website of the NGO Committee for UNICEF.

The profile was prepared by The Advocacy Project on behalf of the GMC in advance of the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children.

The profile takes the form of sixteen illustrated web pages that describe the life of vulnerable children in Delhi and the efforts of groups that work with them. The material - photographs and articles - was collected by writer Anaga Dalal during a visit to India in February.

The Global Movement for Children was launched on April 26 last year by UNICEF and six prominent NGOs with a call to 'Say Yes' to children. People were asked to pledge support for ten principles that protect children and vote on the three they considered most urgent. The ten principles can be found on the website of the Global Movement.

The aim of the Global Movement is to mobilize support for children in the run-up to the Special Session, particularly at the community level. 4.5 million Indians have made pledges, and the Movement has the enthusiastic support of the Indian government at the national and local levels.

At the same time, Ms. Dalal finds that life for many young Indians remains perilous. One-third of the world's malnourished children (54 million) live in India and 25 percent of Indian girls do not live past the age of fifteen. India also has as many as 100 million child laborers. At least 500,000 Indian children live and work on the streets.

Ms. Dalal's portrait offers a graphic account of what it means to be young and unprotected on the streets. But it also offers countless inspiring examples of community action that draw from the ten principles of the Global Movement. Some are highly personal. Eighty year-old Usha Maira spends many hours a week educating nine-year old Ajay, a 'ragpicker' who collects trash in her exclusive New Delhi neighborhood.

The picture emerges of a Global Movement that is flexible enough to be adapted to local needs, while providing a clear and specific set of principles. As Ms. Dalal notes, this formula may be a political necessity in a huge decentralized country that has never taken kindly to imposed messages from the outside.

Opinion:

By Naomi Lightman (Young People's Press, Toronto)

Let's Work it Out

As summer approaches quickly here in Toronto, it seems like each day it becomes harder to focus on school and easier to imagine our upcoming vacation. Most of my friends are dedicating their free time to the hunt for the all-important summer job.

Some of them hope to be working as counselors at summer camps, others in coffee shops, restaurants or as lifeguards on the beach. They hope to occupy their time, meet new people and make spending money for their time off.

For teenagers in the global North, it is far too easy to remain ignorant about all of the children in the world who are being exploited and denied an education in order to produce the numerous products on which we 'depend.'

So many of us simply choose to ignore the stories behind that T-shirt or running shoes we are buying, or even the iced coffee we are sipping. These products, and so many others, are often made by child workers around the world. There are currently 120 million children under the age of 15 who work full-time.

It's a vicious cycle. Youth in the North are getting summer jobs to earn money that we will probably end up spending on products that may have been made by the slave labor of other children.

This is a harsh reality that we must work to overcome!

What are our options?

This week, I came across a new initiative called Positive Chocolate, sponsored by Save the Children Canada and TransFair Canada. This program is aiming to build an understanding and commitment by consumers, government officials, chocolate manufacturers and the general public to children's rights in the production and manufacturing of chocolate.

There are 71 locations in Canada where fair-trade chocolate products are sold. These places only buy chocolate products from democratically organized groups of farmers and pay a set minimum price that covers the cost of production.

We're not going to change the world by munching on fair trade chocolate, but it's a start. I'm certainly going to check out some of the places near my home.

Fair trade is just one example of how we can make a difference in our everyday lives.

The United Nations Special Session on Children is another. It is a time for heads of state, NGOs and children themselves to discuss these issues and take definitive steps forward. The upcoming weeks are a time to learn more about the issues facing children and youth and to organize ourselves and prepare.

You, as youth, can start getting your views heard as journalists for On the Record for Children. Tell us how youth in your communities are organizing for social change or about what you would say if you had the opportunity to address world leaders at the Special Session. Please send your 150-200 word mini-articles to the Young People's Press newsroom. Read Lee Yoke Lee's reader response in this issue.

Free the Children

By Dina Zalkind, Young People's Press

What does it feel like to realize that young people very similar to you, somewhere in the world, are being murdered for standing up and speaking for their rights? In 1995, Craig Kielburger, 12, was horrified to read that a young Pakistani had suffered this fate. Kielburger, a young Canadian, was determined to do something to help children around the world, so he and some friends founded a non-profit organization, Free The Children (FTC).

The purpose of FTC is to liberate children from abuse, slavery and poverty, and make them aware of their rights, as well as to give other children and youth the opportunity to help others.

This organization grew quickly and became influential on an international level, and today Free The Children exists in more than 35 countries. Some of their major accomplishments include building schools and medical centers, providing medical supplies and counseling, and helping to rescue children from sex trades. This organization demonstrates that young people CAN help to create better conditions and rights for children all over the planet.

- For more information, and to see how you can get involved, visit FTC's website.

About the Special Session:

NGO Interactive Dialogues During Special Session

NGO Interactive Dialogues will take place daily during the Special Session from 1:15-3:00 pm in Conference Room 4. The theme for May 8 is the Outcome Document, government commitments, and the NGO role in developing National Plans of Action. May 9 will be devoted to an evaluation of government and NGO commitments at the regional and national levels, as well as a discussion of how local and regional NGOs can assist governments in developing and monitoring National Plans of Action. On the final day Under 18 NGOs will highlight ways to bring the goals of the Outcome document to life.

NGO Committee Urges Those Outside U.S to Secure Their Visas

Members of the NGO Steering Committee are urging all participants traveling to the Special Session to make sure they have valid visas for the United States. Heightened security concerns and tighter immigration controls in the United States will make it very difficult for those traveling without valid visas, organizers say. All youth participants are also urged to keep a guardian letter with them at all times, along with a confirmation letter from the Committee and a valid passport and visa for the United States. Contact your local US embassy or consulate for instructions on how to apply for a visa to the United States.

Girls' Speakout to Focus on Gender Representation During Children's Forum

The May 8 'girls' speakout' co-sponsored by the Working Group on Girls of the NGO Committee on UNICEF, the World Association of Girl Guides, Girl Scouts USA, and the International Council of Jewish Women will take up the question of gender representation during the children's forum. Girl participants will share their opinions about the inclusion of girls during the youth forum. A final list of participants for the speakout has not yet been finalized.

- For more information contact Roberta Ross by phone (US) 212 756-9950 or email.

Also Noted:

Working Group on Girls Preparing New Fact Sheets on Law and Poverty

The Working Group on Girls of the NGO Committee on UNICEF is preparing new fact sheets on the status of girls in the law and in poverty. One fact sheet, on girls and the law, will cover such topics as birth registration, inheritance laws, consensual marriage and domestic labor. The group is also helping prepare a fact sheet on early marriage for a Special Session panel co-sponsored with the World Association for Girl Guides.

The Working Group on Girls has also prepared material on girls and HIV/AIDS, the trafficking of girls, health issues pertaining to girls, education for girls, violence against girls, and the economic exploitation of girls.

- For information on upcoming fact sheets phone Roberta Ross at (USA) 212-756-9950 or email.

Dublin Meeting on Child Poverty in Developed World Set for April 25

On April 25, the Children's Rights Alliance will host a meeting on child poverty in wealthy nations in Dublin. For more information, contact Ciara Murphy by phone (353) 1 4054823 in Dublin or by email.

Armenia Will Hold Conference to Discuss its National Plan of Action

On April 26-27, government and civil society leaders will meet in Armenia to discuss Armenia's National Plan of Action for Children, which has been labelled a priority by the government. For more information contact Karine Soudjian by phone 3741 544041, extension 223 or by email.

New Participation Handbook for Young People Available

Free the Children, a child rights organization based in Canada that encourages young people to become activists on behalf of young people everywhere, has published a guidebook for young activists. 'Take Action! A Guide to Active Citizenship' lists practical tips to help young people become community leaders. To obtain a copy, visit Free the Children or call:

(800) 203-9091 FREE or (905) 760-9382 in Canada.

From the Editors:

About On the Record for Children

On the Record for Children is the newsletter of the NGO Committee on UNICEF, a network of 125 nongovernmental organizations that work closely with UNICEF while remaining independent.

On the Record for Children has covered the run-up to the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Children since January 2001. It will be produced in email form until the Special Session, which will be covered daily in email and hard copy versions. One issue will be produced by young journalists for the Children's Forum.

On the Record for Children is produced by **The Advocacy Project** (AP). Anaga Dalal is the principal writer and Colleen Malone serves as copy editor and manager. AP is also working with Young People's Press (YPP), a Toronto-based organization that trains and works with young journalists. Naomi Lightman, 16, from YPP, serves as youth editor for On the Record for Children.

The material in On the Record for Children is reviewed by an editorial group of the NGO Committee prior to publication. The editors welcome ideas for articles, letters, and opinion pieces, although they might be edited for length. Please email us.

The material in this issue will be posted on the website of the NGO Committee, together with photos where appropriate. The website is currently being revised.