

Human Rights Council 57th Session Side Event: Supporting Children's Right to Participate in Public Affairs

Concept note

Date: 19 September 2024, 13h-14h

Venue: Room XXV, Palais des Nations

Organized by: Child Rights Connect, Save the Children International, World Vision International, Terre des Hommes International Federation

Supported by: Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Permanent Mission of Czech Republic to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Permanent Mission of Peru to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations in Geneva, Permanent Mission of the European Union to the United Nations Office in Geneva and the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations Office in Geneva.

Background

The right of children to participate in public affairs is a fundamental aspect of their overall human rights, yet often misunderstood. In different regions of the world, children mobilize actively, stand up against injustice and defend their own as well as the human rights of others. These child human rights defenders (CHRDs) want to be part of the solutions to the problems of the world. Children's parliaments, councils, clubs and consultations with children are some of the few processes and structures which allow children's voices to be heard in public decision making in a safe and empowering way. This right is explicitly recognized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), particularly in Articles 12 – 17 covering civil and political rights for children. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) complements the CRC on this right by acknowledging the right of every citizen, including children, to participate in public affairs, as outlined in Article 25. These international instruments underscore the importance of children's voices in shaping policies and decisions that impact their lives.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has emphasized that States have positive obligations to remove any barriers to children exercising their right to participate in decisions that affect them; to provide training on Article 12 for professionals who work with and for children; to support children by providing the necessary legislative and administrative resources to realize their rights and to challenge negative attitudes that may hinder the exercise of children's rights to participate meaningfully in society.¹ The OHCHR Guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs call for States to "ensure that the right of children to express their views freely and to be heard is

¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.12: The right of the child to be heard (2009) CRC/C/GC/12 at para.49

guaranteed, including by establishing child-friendly, age-appropriate, gender-sensitive, inclusive, and safe mechanisms for their meaningful engagement." However, additional guidance is needed to unpack how to ensure this right for children.

Despite these clear legal frameworks, children worldwide encounter significant barriers to exercising their civil and political rights. These barriers might be exacerbated by children that compounded forms of discrimination such as girls, children with disabilities, those from diverse ethnic backgrounds, children who are refugees or stateless, among others. These barriers include a lack of awareness among children and adults, societal attitudes that undervalue children's opinions, and limited opportunities for meaningful engagement in public decision-making processes. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from States, international organizations, civil society, and communities to create environments where children can actively and effectively participate in public affairs. Children's participation presents an important opportunity for States to consider the views, needs, rights in developing policy that has a significant impact on children's lives. Children can contribute significantly to policy development by offering ideas and opinions, which can increase the 'relevance and effectiveness' of policies affecting children.²

Objectives

The side event aims at providing a platform to in particular:

1. Explain what is meant by children's civil and political rights, in particular their right to participate in public affairs.
2. Shed light on the exercise by children of their civil and political rights and highlight the importance of children's participation in public affairs as a fundamental human right.
3. Identify effective strategies and good practices in the development and implementation of law and policy that States can adopt to support and enhance children's participation.
4. Share experiences and lessons learned from various regions and contexts.
5. Foster collaboration and partnerships among States, NGOs, international organizations, children and other stakeholders.

Programme

Opening remarks: Ambassador Carlos Mata Prates, Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva and Permanent Mission of Peru to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva (tbc)

Moderator: Diarra Diop, Senior Child Rights Advocacy Advisor, Save the Children International

Panel:

² [Save the Children International 2020, THE RIGHT OF CHILDREN TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES](#)

- Joan, Andrea and Cristina, Representatives of the National Council of Children and Adolescents of Catalonia
- Ambassador Fernando Espinosa, Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva
- Mikiko Otani, Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and President of Child Rights Connect
- Bikramjeet Barta, Human Rights and Democracy Adviser - Rule of Law and Democracy Section, OHCHR