



World Vision®

# Writing for Rights

## Letters from the World's Children

*A compilation of 25 letters from 25 children  
on the 25th Anniversary of the  
Convention on the Rights of the Child*

**NOVEMBER 2014**

**R** No. 1411  
NIUE

BY AIR MAIL  
PAR AVION  
BY AIR MAIL  
PAR AVION



# About the Convention on the Rights of the Child

**The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)  
is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in the world.**

The CRC contains 54 Articles that outline the fundamental civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights for all children under 18 years of age.

**The CRC is guided by four principles:**

1. Non-discrimination
2. The best interests of the child
3. The right to life, survival and development
4. Respect for the views of the child.

The rights in the CRC apply to all children equally,  
regardless of gender, ability, country, religion or any other status.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva monitors  
the CRC's implementation. Each country that has ratified the CRC must report  
on its progress of implementation to the Committee every five years.

**The CRC was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly  
on 20 November 1989.**

Link to the CRC itself

> <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

Link to a plain-language overview of the CRC

> [http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights\\_overview.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf)

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# Foreword



**AKTER SAMSUNNAHAR** attended the 2013 United Nations General Assembly as a 16-year-old children's rights advocate from Bangladesh.

She was one of a number of young people whom WorldVision had encouraged to attend debates about issues affecting children and youth. She spoke passionately about the girls' right to an education, against early marriage and in favour of universal access to health care.

I met Akter again in 2014, in Khulna Division in Bangladesh. I was amazed by the passion and maturity of the members of her Child Forum as they told me stories of victories and setbacks in their quest to improve the lives of all the children and youths in their community. I was moved by 13-year-old Rabeya, who tearfully explained how she had been saved from early marriage by the Child Forum's persistence in approaching her father every morning for 15 days.

Society can be judged not only by the way it treats its most vulnerable and weakest members, but also by the opportunities it gives them to speak and act for themselves. In this regard, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, now 25 years old, marks a significant moment in modern history.

For the first time, the world's governments and opinion makers recognised that children, our most precious resource for the future and often our most vulnerable citizens, all deserve a common degree of protection.

Those who are more susceptible to poverty and neglect have a right to assume that the world will seek to work in their behalf to provide greater opportunities to develop their talents and opportunities.

The CRC created a set of standards and norms for children against which governments can be measured and held to account. It redefined children as competent to speak and act on their own behalf, and declared them participants in decisions that affect their lives.

The reality, of course, is that the CRC is just a document unless we contribute to making it a reality. If drafting the document were enough, how can there still be so many children going to bed hungry, so many trafficked for labour or sex, so many beaten or dying of preventable illnesses?

In the next year WorldVision will be pushing to put children's rights at the heart of the new Sustainable Development Goals that the world will agree to work towards from 2015 onwards. This is a unique opportunity to put deliberate targets in place that breathe new life into the CRC.

WorldVision has formally endorsed the CRC as a framework for its own child-focused activities. We have adopted targets to demonstrate our commitment to children's well-being, and we encourage governments to do the same. We urge political leaders to listen to the voices of children and be accountable for decisions that affect children's lives today and in the world they will inherit from us.

That is part of what WorldVision means by its vision 'for every child, life in all its fullness,' and it is the common note of optimism which rings out of the 25 letters gathered together in this report.

I hope you will enjoy reading what these children have to tell us.

*Kevin J. Jenkins*  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
WORLD VISION INTERNATIONAL



Dear Sir,

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 19 grants all children a right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, in body or mind. Governments have a responsibility to make sure our rights are protected, help our families to protect our rights and create an environment where we can grow and reach our potential as stipulated in Article 4 of the CRC. However, children have been the most abused and vulnerable in our country of Uganda. Girls have been victims of child abuse. So many girls have dropped out of school due to a number of reasons ranging from early marriages, early pregnancies, defilement and little value attached to girl-child education. In a school where I study, an average of eight girls do not complete their education because they get pregnant after being defiled.

Child abuse cases reported to police in our community for the year July 2012–June 2013 were 108 with defilement rating the highest at 50 per cent followed by child neglect at 31 per cent. This means almost 10 per cent of children in our country are abused every year; and besides this, there are so many child abuse cases which go unreported because community leaders connive with the criminals to settle the matter after being bribed.

We are also facing a big challenge of corruption in our country. So many children are deprived of their right to education just because of poor facilities in schools, absence of enough teachers, and presence of fewer schools in communities. All these are attributed to embezzlement of funds by relevant authorities. Increased child mortality in Uganda is a result of embezzling funds meant to provide vaccines in health centres. Parents are unable to provide well for their children because of poverty caused by increased corruption in our country.

Article 4 of the CRC gives the government a responsibility to make sure children are protected and help our families create an environment where children can grow and reach their potential. How can we be protected from illnesses when we do not access basic health services? How can we access quality education when we do not even have enough schools in communities? How can we be protected from all forms of child abuse when criminals connive with government leaders through corruption and they go unpunished?

I believe that all these can change; we can have a world free from corruption. We can live in an environment where we are fully protected from all forms of child abuse. I believe political leaders can still reform and have a heart of love for their country. If measures are put in place to reduce corruption in developing countries like Uganda and also if child protection is considered as one of the major goals to be included in the post-2015 agenda, I believe that children will enjoy good life like never before.

*Johnson, 17 years old*

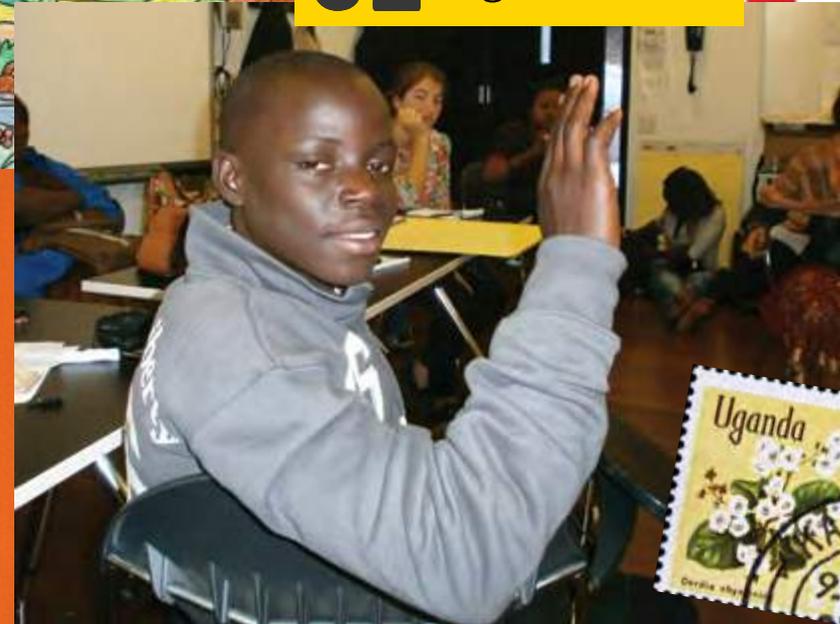


LETTER

01

Uganda

*Johnson,  
17 years old*



**“If measures are put in place to reduce corruption in developing countries like Uganda and also if child protection is considered as one of the major goals to be included in the post-2015 agenda, I believe that children will enjoy good life like never before.”**

Lebanon

LETTER  
02



**Sarah,  
16 years old,  
from  
Lebanon**

“Despite the great achievements, we all know that many children are still working instead of studying because of financial reasons and parental pressure. Children are also still facing discrimination and violence in addition to sexual abuse.”

My name is Sarah, I am 16 years old, and I am from Lebanon. It's a great pleasure to write for you this letter. I'm so glad about the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and want to congratulate the convention for all that this agreement has achieved. Furthermore, it has changed the life of many children all around the world, saved their lives, rescued them from hunger, relieved them from homelessness and is helping them passing the difficulties of life.

We all know what the status of the children was before the convention and how much they suffered. This agreement identified the real identity of the children's rights and gave us awareness to make the right decision and the ability to defend children. In other words, children understood the true meaning of freedom. Children are now caring more about knowing their rights and are demanding them; even girls are participating. In the past there were no laws that gave girls their right to express their opinions and to share their point of views – this was due to ignorance and lack of awareness.

We should not forget that the rate of illiteracy has decreased. Moreover, children have known how much education is important and necessary to reach their goals and to realise their hopes. All that happened because of this convention. I really appreciate all you accomplished until now, but we need more.

Despite the great achievements, we all know that many children are still working instead of studying because of financial reasons and parental pressure. Children are also still facing discrimination and violence in addition to sexual abuse.

On top of that we are, until now, confronting the problem of the armed conflict. This is why we are asking the government and all the stakeholders to take measures in order to protect children from armed conflicts and to punish everyone responsible of exposing children's lives to danger.

We should also remember what you have said about the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) that is, till now, not completely achieved; because of this the new MDGs needs to include clear objectives to end violence against children.

I hope you take into consideration our demands and continue following up on children's rights. Wish you a joyful anniversary and hope that next year all the children will enjoy their rights.

Yours,  
Sarah, 16 years old



**Jeannette,  
17 years old**



My name is Jeannette, and I am from a small town in southern Chile. Our town has a strong coal-mining tradition and a reputation for being sexist. According to the National Institute of Statistics of Chile, I am part of the 14.45 per cent of girls between 0 and 19 years of age who are living in a situation of gender inequality. I was born when Chile had signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and grew up memorising those rights, but in reality I thought those rights were more for boys than for girls.

As the eldest of three children, it has been always my responsibility to help out around the house and take care of my younger brother. He is 5 years old and calls me Mom Jani – it does not bother me at all, but I also understand that it is not my role to be the mother. It is something I have to do.

To be realistic, girls are given fewer opportunities than boys. Even when we are babies society forces us to be identified by the colour of our clothing and to behave in specific ways according to our gender. We even have to be proud of the piercings of our ears, just hours after we are born, just because we were girls.

I have also always wondered why adults tend to generalise both genders with the word niños (boys)? We always feel the pressure to be identified by the male gender. Wouldn't it be fairer to say boys and girls, not only boys? Why don't people take the time to say president, doctor, architect and many other words with the female word? Otherwise it seems like the words and names were made just for males. These are some of the many questions that worry me, because I grew up like many other girls with the idea that just because we were women we had fewer rights than men.

This situation worsens when we are teenagers. Only a decade ago schoolgirls who fell pregnant were pressured to drop out of school or were simply expelled. Fortunately, pregnant teenagers now have counselling, access to nurseries for their babies and support to continue their education in a more flexible way. They are now given opportunities to study and become professionals while they carry out the responsibilities of motherhood. Despite the need to carry new roles, these young mothers also remain girls and they must enjoy all the rights granted under the convention.

PAR AVION  
BY AIR MAIL

LETTER

03 Chile

page 2

Of course, in order to make a change, this must be made globally, involving the education system, the state, public health and even the family, so that from the nucleus of society we can promote equal rights and opportunities for all. This way, girls could help in their homes, not being required to be a teen mom just for being a female, but as a way of contributing to the family.

I would like it if girls do not grow thinking that when they are adults they need to get married and have children as the only goal in life. I also thought that my life would be like that, but when I began to realise that women have the same value as men and we are able to do things and move forward, then my goals started to be different.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and I would like people to tell of the convention of the BOY and the GIRL. I think this is a way of levelling the playing field and convince all the girls that they have equal rights like men.

In my case I feel very fortunate because I have met people who also believe that we girls have the same abilities as everyone and we can reach our dreams. This has opened my mind, and I have started to trust my abilities and strengths. I joined a Children's Club, and I became the spokeswoman of this group of children and youth in my hometown. There I found many young people like me who want to change the world for good.

I do not know exactly what my path will be in the future, but today I know that I have as many rights as anyone else. I'm worth the same as a man, and the Convention on the Rights of BOYS and GIRLS has helped me to know that.

In my country we have a woman as the president of the Republic. This makes me believe that there are neither limits nor restrictions for this generation of girls. There are only some cultural issues that we need to improve all together as a society to enforce the convention fully and to achieve what we crave ... true gender equality.

*Jeannette, 17 years old*

**“I do not know exactly what my path will be in the future, but today I know that I have as many rights as anyone else.”**

Indonesia

LETTER  
04



"I and my friends are really grateful for having the Child Rights Convention. It can give us a guarantee to live healthy, to have freedom to play, to state our opinions, and to be protected in our families and community, so all of us can live fully to our well-being."

*Nita discusses with some friends from Forancikha (Forum Anak Cinta Khatulistiwa- Love the Equator Children's Forum) to get input for her letter.*



My name is Nita, 14 years old, from Pontianak City, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. I am a student of Senior High School 9 in the 10th grade. I am also a member of Love the Equator Children's Forum. I have joined in a lot of activities with the Children's Forum<sup>1</sup> to fight for children's rights in our area.

I would like to share with you about the condition of children's rights in our area. The first right is about the right to participate. I raise this topic because I see lots of my friends who have not yet got their right to participate. One example is the right to participate in the family, such as the freedom to choose school by themselves. I feel lucky that I could choose my own school to continue my study. But still, many of my friends who could not choose schools by themselves are forced to attend unintended schools. As a result, there are some friends who are getting lazy and skipping school without teachers' and parents' consent. Some of them even do negative things, such as using drugs and smoking. In my opinion, one of the solutions to encourage them to go to school is making schools more fun – for instance, by adding extracurricular activities, a forum to express ourselves, removing violence from schools, and bringing fun and friendly teachers. What do you think about my ideas?

One more thing I would like to tell you about is the school bus. The school bus is very important for students' transportation. Unfortunately, there are still limited school buses available in our area. That is why there are plenty of students (Junior and Senior High School students) who ride their own motorcycles. I also have to ride a motorcycle by myself. My father has to work, and my mother cannot drive a motorcycle, so reluctantly I have to drive a motorcycle by myself to avoid being late for school since my school is far away from home. Even worse, some of my friends became victims of accidents when going to school, and some of them died. I have also had an accident on the way to school by motorcycle, but gratefully I survived. It was only a little part of consequences due to the unavailability of the school bus for students. If the government and related agencies provide more school buses, certainly there will be fewer children who ride motorcycles by themselves. I think it is really important to consider because it is also our right to get education and protection, isn't it?

I and my friends are really grateful for having the Child Rights Convention. It can give us a guarantee to live healthy, to have freedom to play, to state our opinions, and to be protected in our families and community, so all of us can live fully to our well-being. That's why we wish that the children's rights in Indonesia and in the world are fulfilled. Particularly, we also wish that we would have a space and opportunity to participate and share our ideas and facilitate children's organisations such as the Forum to fulfil our right to participate from the local to the global level. We hope that government will provide safe and affordable transportation to our school as well. Our prayer is that our parents could more understand and care for us.

That is my story from Indonesia. We will lead the future generations of this nation and the world, so we hope that Your Excellencies can listen and help fulfil our rights. We also promise to perform our duties and responsibilities with our best. Thank you so much for the opportunity given to me to represent the children in Indonesia. I apologise for any imperfection and unkind word in my letter.

Yours truly,  
Nita, 14 years old

<sup>1</sup> Forum Anak Cinta Khatulistiwa – FORANCIKHA.

For most of my life, I had never realised how tremendously fortunate I was. I was (and remain) immensely idealistic, one of those 'glass half full' types, always believing that the world is inherently good. My views did not change, but my understanding of the world did with a profound experience more than 10 years ago – a younger version of myself once sat in front of a television screen, flipping the channels and absent-mindedly landing on a news report on a conflict in Asia. While watching the news, I took in the knowledge that the thing called war I used to hear about was real, that the screams and the cries of the bloodied children that I was viewing were real, and that the actuality of the children and I having vastly contrasting lives was real. I was aware of what I was viewing in front of my very eyes but was not be able to completely register the meaning of all of it.

In Canada, going to school is the norm. Having access to health care is the norm. Feeling safe, secure and happy with oneself is the norm. The utter realisation that this norm was in fact not the norm for everyone was a bit of a confusing and saddening concept for me to fathom. However disappointing of a thing it was for me to realise, though, it has given me the wisdom to realise that the world I saw through rose-tinted glasses was unfortunately not always the same world for others. This is a problem, yes. But every problem has a solution. The perfect world I had previously envisioned was not the world at that time, nor is it the world at present, but that is not to say that we cannot make it become the world in the future.

I am extremely grateful for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and for the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that monitors it and its implementation. I now know that it has been the governing body for the rights I exercise every day, like going to school, staying with my family, and feeling safe and secure with my life and my surroundings. This knowledge is uplifting, but I am saddened that despite the CRC existing, injustice is still rampant in this world, and that the rights of children are often still violated. It is clear that the enforcement of my rights has helped me immeasurably to be a happier person, but for many children around the world, a lack of enforcement is crippling to their happiness and limiting to their potential.

I believe that it is tremendously important for everyone – 'Average Joes' and world leaders alike – to see the value in a child's rights. Children are brilliant, beautiful, talented and creative beings but are often disrespected. I want there to be a universal epiphany: That children are incredible. That children are important. That children have rights, and that these rights should be recognised and respected.

Upon looking at the concluding observations of the CRC, I am still a bit concerned. Though there is more social conscientiousness, the lives of many are still impaired and jeopardised because children's rights are still not being taken seriously. I find it to be extremely imperative to close the gaps in the struggle to obtain human rights for children. That is not to say that I do not see reason for optimism. Global change does not happen overnight, and there is evidence that the act of teaching children about their rights has improved their awareness of their own rights, making them more respectful of the rights of others, and has empowered them to make a change.

I personally am excited to see the change that every new day will bring, culminating into a future where everyone's rights are present and respected. The idealist in me – from the little girl watching the news in the past, to the 17-year-old writing this letter at present – is smiling.

Tenaaz, 17 years old



Children in Canada come together to have a say in their future.



“Global change does not happen overnight, and there is evidence that the act of teaching children about their rights has improved their awareness of their own rights, making them more respectful of the rights of others, and has empowered them to make a change.”

LETTER

05

Canada



# Honduras

LETTER  
**06**



*Dina, aged 14, writing from Honduras*

“The knowledge that we have about our rights and the convention itself is due to the things we have learned in the schools and in different workshops in which we have participated. This helps us a lot in order to fight for our rights to be respected, starting within our homes.”

We, children from Honduras, are sending warm greetings to all children of the world.

This year marks 25 years of having passed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is a good time to reflect on the compliance by Member States that committed themselves to comply to it. We Honduran boys and girls want to share our experiences of what we have learned and lived in terms of our rights as well as the difficulties we face in our country.

Our country is a young country since almost half of the population are children and we have many resources and potential. As children, we have hope and want to have a better lifestyle today and in the future. Every country has difficulties. In Honduras the main ones are insecurity, violence in schools and communities, migration and poverty.

This time we want to focus on the issue of migration of children, since this is an issue that the government has been focusing on since more than 20,000 boys and girls have migrated from our country to the United States seeking better life choices and due to the harsh situation in our country.

We as children feel the problems, and we know that the harsh situation we are experiencing is due to the lack of financial resources, limited employment opportunities, domestic violence, different forms of abuse and few educational opportunities for middle and upper level people. With this type of situation the people who suffer most are the children from our country who have many hopes and dreams. But these dreams appear dark and unrealistic, knowing that many of us want to live a decent life with many opportunities and build a new healthy environment free from anything [negative] affecting our well-being.

From meetings and trainings where we have participated and the information we have acquired by other means, we have realised that many of these problems are the results of the lack of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the government. So, we children from Honduras daily experience violations and aggressions to our rights and well-being.

Knowing that children are the present and future of our country, we demand that the Honduran government implement the convention and the various treaties and laws that benefit children. We also demand that the state plan and invest in us, the boys and girls in Honduras, through programmes and projects aimed at improving our education, health, welfare and protection. Furthermore, we ask to establish in every town spaces for recreation, to bring secondary and higher education to our communities and to create jobs for our parents to prevent migration. This way we can be sure to meet the requirement set in the Convention on the Rights of the Child that aims at ensuring the best interests of children in the world.

The knowledge that we have about our rights and the convention itself is due to the things we have learned in the schools and in different workshops in which we have participated. This helps us a lot in order to fight for our rights to be respected, starting within our homes.

On behalf of all children in Honduras, we celebrate our rights and say yes to participation and fulfilment of our rights.

God bless!!!

*Dina, 14 years old*

Letter to the United Nations:

Most of the people are aware of the United Nations' peacekeeping efforts and the humanitarian support to underdeveloped countries. However, it is not the case when it comes to the various ways that the UN directly affects our lives, all over the world.

Despite the fact that the United Nations and its institutions operate daily and without interruption, collectively and individually for the protection of human rights, strengthening the protection of the environment, assisting the advancement of children's rights, combating epidemics, famine and poverty, this is not enough.

After several years of the Syrian conflict, we find that the children are the most affected ones.

The bloody violence in Syria continues for the fourth year, and still a whole generation of Syrian children is suffering from the brutal atrocities. In neighbouring countries more than 1.2 million children are struggling to survive as refugees, having no security and a lot of social tensions and educational barriers; nevertheless, these children are determined to survive for the sake of themselves, their friends and families.

The main reason that pushes children away from schools and education leading to child labour and begging is the need of their parents and their younger siblings for the money and school necessities. Also the racism by the society towards Syrian children has caused them psychological problems and made them introverts, destroyed their feelings and ruined their childhood. They were deprived of many of their rights, mainly the right to study and the right to play.

In the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we the Syrian children ask the United Nations

- that the host countries provide legal assistance (facilities) for child refugees in these countries so they can move freely and assist them in securing basic needs including food, water, accommodation, education and employment opportunities
- that the host communities treat child refugees better and accept us until this crisis will end
- in the end, we hope that every child can enjoy the rights that were deprived from him or her and that we go back to our country safe [in order] to live a free and dignified life that enables us to build our future.

Yours,  
*Mau'men, 14 years old*

LETTER

07

Lebanon  
Syrian refugee  
child



*Mau'men, 14 years old*



“After several years of the Syrian conflict, we find that the children are the most affected ones.”



Alice,  
16 years old

“As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the CRC, my message to those in our government is to thank them for their efforts to improve education in Sierra Leone, but most important, to alert them to the reality of the poorest children in the most remote villages and the need to ensure that they have equal access and opportunities as the more privileged children in cities.”



Dear Friends,

My name is Alice – 16 years old. I live in Matru Jong, Southern Sierra Leone. Education is indeed the key to success and an asset for children to grow up and acquire better understanding of issues in their communities, country and worldwide. It gives children the opportunity to contribute to national issues and help to change the world for the greater good of all. This is the vision of Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for all children.

Even though the quest for education in rural communities has increased, this demand does not match the available infrastructure and facilities for children. Due to the unavailability of secondary schools in most rural communities, children who are promoted to secondary school move from their original communities where they live with their parents to chiefdom or district headquarter towns where secondary schools are mostly concentrated. This means living away from home with relatives or friends of their parents. These relatives/friends of parents consider such children as additional burden to their meagre family resources, which may not be enough to feed everyone.

These caregivers usually require such children to sell items to bring income and do other household chores which do not allow them enough time to go to school as often as expected. Most of these children end up dropping out of school, get exposed to sexual abuse from men, become pregnant and are eventually not able to achieve their goals. This is the reality of a typical rural education, and girls are usually the most affected group.

As a girl, I bleed in my heart as I go through the intentions of the CRC and the blind eye that is given to the reality by the government of Sierra Leone and community leaders. I ask to make this dream a reality for Sierra Leonean children.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the CRC, my message to those in our government is to thank them for their efforts to improve education in Sierra Leone, but most important, to alert them to the reality of the poorest children in the most remote villages and the need to ensure that they have equal access and opportunities as the more privileged children in cities.

God bless us all.  
Alice, 16 years old

Dear Sir,

Greetings from Bangladesh!

A child should play with her doll and go to school with joy with her friends. But when a child who still does not know how to take care of her own health or how to put her books in order is married, unfortunately she has to take all the responsibilities of her husband's household at that time. A young child can become a victim of inhumane oppression and roguery, when she can't do work properly.

Two years ago a 16-year-old girl named Hira became married due to poverty and helplessness. In her early age her mother died. Her father married again. Her stepmother used to oblige her to do work rather than let her study. When she was 16, her father compelled her to marry a boy who is less than 21 years old. Within one month she became divorced and had to come back home. She is passing an unbearable, helpless life now. This type of example is often seen in this area.

Many under-age girls die when giving birth to a child. An under-age mother cannot take care of her child properly, and so the child does not grow up properly due to lack of nutritious food. About 40 per cent of girls under 18 become married in our area. Most of them become victims of child marriage between 13 and 17 years of age. I do not see any noticeable action by government, Union Parishad (UP),<sup>1</sup> chairman or members in this regard. In fact, many of them are involved in this matter. Sometimes they are the ones who provide birth certificates that show a higher age and attend the wedding also. I cannot see any salvation from this.

CRC articles 19 and 34 talk about protecting children. In the Child Marriage Prevention Act (amended in 1984) it has been said that child marriage means the marriage of a girl under 18 or a boy under 21 years old. According to the punishment provision, if an adult person marries a child or becomes involved in child marriage then he or she will be condemned with 1,000 taka<sup>2</sup> or one month imprisonment. The local corporation or UP chairman is empowered to give that punishment according to the law.

Awareness should be raised in this area further so no one becomes unbearably helpless like Hira. The law-enforcement agency should take special initiatives regarding this. A birth certificate has to be digitised. The punishment for child marriage is of no value. They should be punished with 50,000 taka or two years rigorous imprisonment or both. Many times child marriage happens because of women also, and they should be punished the same. Request to Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General of UN: please advise our government to become stern on child marriage prevention as well as child protection.

*Kaniz, 14 years old*

<sup>1</sup> A Union Parishad is the smallest rural administrative and local government unit in Bangladesh.

<sup>2</sup> A taka is the Bangladeshi currency unit.



*Kaniz,  
14 years  
old*

**“Many under-age girls die when giving birth to a child. An under-age mother cannot take care of her child properly, and so the child does not grow up properly due to lack of nutritious food.”**

LETTER

09

Bangladesh





page 2

**Our rights to identity and freedom are also trampled:** The number of Haitian children working as domestic workers is extremely high, and 80 per cent of them are girls like me. I have many friends who have left their families to work.

One of them told me she was beaten several times a day, was not even sent to school and was forced to do all the housework without exception; some days, she would work for 14 hours.

**Where is the dignity?** Where is the respect for the rights of children? Imagine under what conditions these children are evolving. What will happen to Haiti, which has a population of about 40 per cent of children younger than 17 years old, if so many young people find themselves in the streets, with no education, with no future?

But we must also mention progress. Indeed, more and more the government, as well as local and international organisations, are promoting the CRC and doing advocacy to ensure respect of children rights. During the past three years advocacy has increased, and some laws for children have been adopted, such as a law reforming adoption; a law on human trafficking; and a law on fatherhood-motherhood and paternity.

The goals established 25 years ago have not yet been achieved, despite great advances. It is therefore imperative to set new goals to achieve and allow decent living conditions for the poorest children of the nation, because every sacrificed child is a great loss for the nation, one less chance for our country!

*Julien, 16 years old*

**“I dream of a Haiti where all children of my age would have access to medical resources and skilled doctors. Maybe one day I will see this.”**

Twenty-five years ago the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The CRC is the first legally binding international instrument protecting our rights, the rights of children. In my country, Haiti, this text was ratified on 8 June 1995.

The provisions of the convention have been legally binding on our state for at least 20 years. However, a lot of citizens feel that the state should act much more regularly to enforce these rights in the country. So why is there still so much poverty in this country, and why are so many fundamental children's rights ignored? We must talk about the problems of course, but we must also discuss progress.

**Basic health rights are still violated in Haiti:** Indeed, only 40 per cent of children in my country have access to health services. The health centre closest to home, for example, is located tens of kilometres away. You cannot get there if you do not have any money. This system severely limits visits to health centres for my family. In addition to all these constraints, it is not certain, once you get there, that you will find a qualified doctor who will really help you. Most good doctors fled Haiti because of political instability and lack of security.

I dream of a Haiti where all children of my age would have access to medical resources and skilled doctors. Maybe one day I will see this. Meanwhile, infant mortality is extremely high in my country, especially because of diseases such as diarrhoea, respiratory infections, malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS. My little sister died at birth of an unidentified disease. Sometimes I wish I lived in a country where no child would die at birth, or no parent would have to live the atrocity of losing a child. But this is not my reality, and I have to accept it.

As for malnutrition, it is one of the greatest tragedies of our youth. I have many friends who cannot get enough to eat because they cannot afford basic food. This malnutrition is devastating for their health and often leads to serious problems in their growth. I would like to see a Haiti where all children are healthy and can get to adulthood healthy and strong.

**Our educational rights are still violated:** In Haiti, although education is technically free, only half of children are enrolled in primary school. The vast majority of schools are private, thus leaving families unable to pay for tuition. Additionally, uniforms, books and other school materials are very expensive. The initiative of the current government has improved the situation dramatically; however, much progress still needs to be made to ensure that Haitians all have the right to a good education and a good future. I dream to see in the future a country with skilled and educated people!



Albania

LETTER  
12



Emanuela,  
17 years old

“You changed my life, dear Convention. You changed the life of every child who knows you. Because of you, I started to be more confident. I became more responsible. I started thinking about other children around me. I started to communicate freely and collaborate with others.”

Dear Convention,

My name is Emanuela, and I am 17 years old. I live in Albania, and the fact that I met you changed my whole life. That is why today I want to give you a birthday wish.

This is not an ordinary birthday wish that everyone has for you, like to have a happy life. This is a simple wish, with the words of a child that, the moment I met you, saw the world with different eyes.

Before I tell you my wish for you, I want to tell you the story of how I met you.

Until I was 11 years old, I never heard about the CRC or child rights, so I became very curious and started digging further on my knowledge about you. I became part of a children's group, and we decided that our goal was to make you known to all the children in our community and to try hard that whatever was written in your pages was applicable for every child.

And that is when my life started to change. For six years now our group has organised awareness-raising activities, campaigns and camps, and in all activities we talk about you.

You changed my life, dear Convention. You changed the life of every child who knows you. Because of you, I started to be more confident, I became more responsible, I started thinking about other children around me, I started to communicate freely and collaborate with others. You opened a new wonderful world before me and I engaged in your magical world. And now I am very proud that I am one of the agents of change in my community. I am a child who fights for her rights fearlessly. I am proud that I am a young girl in my country undertaking activities in the name of child rights.

But only the efforts that children do are not enough for child rights respected. There are still many gaps, dear Convention, that are not allowing children in my country to enjoy their rights. And I know that this makes you sad.

That is why my wish for your 25th birthday is this:

I wish for all children to know you and that this may be the most unforgettable experience of their life, as it was for me. I wish that every article written in your pages to be respected fully, in order for your goal to be fulfilled in Albania.

Lastly, I wish that you start seeing amazing progress in each and every country that knows you exist, that you may see every right respected, and that you witness smiles and joy in the face of every child. In these 25 years you have changed us and our country. That is why I want you to feel how important you are and how valuable you are to us. Today, you should enjoy the wishes of millions of children throughout the world!

THANK YOU that you became the reason for a better life and the reason that we have a voice today!

Happy Birthday, Convention!  
Emanuela, 17 years old

My name is Khadijah.



I am 17 years of age, and I come from Tolon in the Tolon-Kumbungu district in the northern region of Ghana. I am currently attending Savelugu Senior High (SHS) and am in SHS I. I come from a family of six, with four boys and two girls. My community is very traditional, and many times girls are given out in early marriage. Many girls in the community don't go to school not by choice but because parents prefer to educate the males. The topic I have chosen and discussed with my colleagues to write about is the right of every child to education in Ghana.

Ghana was the first country to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and has since taken steps to address some of the rights of the child. In Ghana, every child has the right to education, as stated in the article 23 and 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. No child should be denied this right, no matter where he or she is, the religion, the tribe or who the child is, whether a disabled or normal person. With education, one can enjoy the basic rights such as the right to survival, the right to protection, the right to participation and the right to development. Besides, education is the key to success.

One can only make a contribution to the country and achieve his or her aim when he or she gets access to education. So I can say that since the inception of the Convention on the Rights of the Child things have improved a lot for children. Education, though not the best, is accessible in many places for children, and the same can be said for health care and other services. However, there are still some challenges faced by children due either to neglect, non-enforcement, weak legislation or lack of political will.

Education is the bedrock of development for every nation, but when education is handicapped, then future generations suffer and quality human resources for tomorrow's leaders are compromised. The following are challenges in the education sector that deny children their right to education.

Inadequate infrastructures is one challenge that prevents children from being in school. Though the government has been trying its best on the expansion of infrastructures, there are still some gaps that need to be filled. Some infrastructures of which there are not enough are classrooms, which brings about sitting under trees to study; furniture, including tables and chairs; libraries; and science and I.C.T. laboratories, which also prevent children from doing necessary research. Also, the insufficient teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, supplementary readers, and syllabi among others are hindering children from having access to quality education. For example, in most schools two or three pupils have to strain their necks to share a textbook during lessons.

Another factor impeding children's right to education is parental neglect. This is so because a number of parents and guardians in hard-to-reach areas within the country do not see the importance of taking their children to school. Children are rather engaged in domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, farming and other commercial activities which keep children away from school entirely.



LETTER

13 Ghana

page 2

Continuing, some cultural practices also serve as barriers to children from accessing school. Some of these cultural practices are female genital mutilation (FGM), the Trokosi system, fostering, early marriages, and so on. These practices also inhibit children's access to education.

In the northern part of Ghana children are sent to their aunts and uncles as foster children and many of these children are used as house girls and shepherd boys; others are sent to the cities to work as head porters (Kayayo). Out of these children, 10 per cent have the privilege of being in school, of which only 3 per cent are girls. Most of these 'Kayayo' girls end up by getting pregnant during their teens, which brings about high rates of teenage pregnancy; others are raped and kidnapped due to their exposure to all forms of dangers, which is also increasing the rate of social vices in the country.

Child employment is another factor that prevents children from going to school. Parents and guardians sometime employ their wards in some petty working area, in order to get or earn money to cater for the family. Some of these children are asked to crack stones at quarry sites, sell on the streets (streetism), illegal mining popularly known as 'galamsey', whereas some are also employed in shops to work as a store or shop attendants. In this situation the children do not get the opportunity to be in school. Some of these children too do not like the idea of being in school since they earn money from the work they do and think they can provide for their needs with the little money they earn.

In order to solve all the challenges mentioned above, the government should invest more in the expansion of educational facilities or infrastructures in order to make sure that the districts, municipal and metropolitan assemblies enforce the existing laws to make it compulsory for every child to be in school.

It would also be appropriate for the government to invest more in the training of quality teachers so that teachers will help improve on the poor performance of children at their basic level of education. Also there is a need for government to scale up the school feeding programmes, especially in the rural areas, in order to meet the survival rights of children at their basic level since not all children in rural areas get access to the school feeding programme.

Furthermore, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other agencies should help the government to support children to be well educated because education is the key to success. Parents should also make sure that their children are in school by visiting them in their various schools to ask of their academic performance and their punctuality at school.

Finally, it is essential that government together with NGOs educate parents in both rural and urban areas on the benefits of education so that every child gets access to quality basic education.

*Khadijah, 17 years old*

India

"I am the only child in my school with a disability, because my parents are aware; however the society in which I live does not provide facilities for the children with disabilities (CWD) to attend school so CWD get fewer opportunities."



Rohit, 14 years old

In my letter I am emphasising education because in my country many children are not attending school, and I want all children to be educated and to grow up as good human beings. We know that there are different provisions in the law for the education of children, and even the CRC also emphasises the quality of education too. We want all children to be educated.

Despite the provisions, in our country many children, including children with disabilities and non-disabled children, do not receive a good education because of lack of good teachers, lack of quality education and lack of other facilities like the issue of accessibility for the children with disabilities, which hinder them from attending schools.

I am the only child in my school with a disability, because my parents are aware; however the society in which I live does not provide facilities for the children with disabilities (CWD) to attend school so CWD get fewer opportunities.

I want all the children of my nation to get opportunities to study, so that they get fullness of life and grow up to be responsible citizen of the country. To make such citizens there should not be any kind of discrimination on the basis of poverty, disability, gender, caste, class, colour and outlook of the children.

To conclude I would like to urge that all the laws and acts related to education like CRC articles, RTE, child rights, etcetera be implemented strictly and be given utmost importance so that all children are educated.

Thank you,

Rohit, 14 years old

Hi,

I have been a member in the Children's Parliament in my school almost a whole year. We meet once a week and there are two representatives from each class. We also have one adult participating, a teacher.

In the Children's Parliament we can decide about things in our school and influence many things. We have given suggestions with regard to the food that is served at school. We were given the opportunity to give our opinion on the quality of the food and propose new dishes. Last time we wished for dessert, like chocolate cake, but we do not know yet if our wish will be granted.

We have also planned a school disco and thought of what kind of things we would need for our school. We wished, for example, for toilet refreshers and this was granted, so now the toilets have a nice scent.

The Children's Parliament also wished that all pupils over the age of 11 years should be allowed to use their mobile phones during break. This wish was made to the teacher present in the Children's Parliament. But it was not granted, since teachers cannot control what all students are doing with their phones during breaks.

The Children's Parliament is very important, since it is a way of advocating for things that bring joy to all students. Teachers have listened to our opinions well and with an open mind. They have also taken our suggestions forward to the City of Vantaa (for example, the food suggestions). You should listen to us children, since in many cases we might be smarter than adults.

I think that child rights and the opinions of children are well perceived in Finland. If adults feel that the ideas make sense, they can be implemented. I realised already when I was little that Finland is a quite equal country, even for children.

*Tuuli, 10 years old*



LETTER  
**15** Finland



“I think that child rights and the opinions of children are well perceived in Finland. If adults feel that the ideas make sense, they can be implemented.”

BY AIR MAIL  
PAR AVION  
BY AIR MAIL  
PAR AVION

Peru

LETTER  
16

Ricky,  
14 years old



“I would ask the government to take into consideration the opinions of children and adolescents and that more resources go to education, health, protection, and participation.”



I am sending this letter to let you know how the children's rights are treated in my community and my country, specifically,

- the right to education, which improves the learning capacity
- the right to participation, which is important to encourage leadership
- the right to be listened to in different decision-making spaces
- the right to protection, which is also very important to our development.

I knew about my rights when I started participating in a children and adolescents organisation. It is then when I understood that some rights are violated. For example, I see that in my community there are children and adolescents who are physically and emotionally abused and that this affects their integrity. In my community there is still a low quality of education, and teachers are not trained and do not have materials needed to facilitate children's learning.

Despite the existence of policies in favour of children and adolescents, even the government does not guarantee the enforcement of children's rights, as children and adolescents are not included in the decision making of authorities. For that reason, I would ask the government to take into consideration the opinions of children and adolescents and that more resources go to education, health, protection and participation.

Children and adolescents not only are the future but also are the present. We want a violence-free life, for us and future generations.

Yours truly,  
Ricky, 14 years old

Dear Leaders of the World,

First, I would like to tell you that I very much appreciate your interest and attention towards youth and children from our country. I wish to share with you, the ones reading my letter; the thoughts and ideas that I spread on this piece of paper. I FEEL VERY LUCKY! Why that is, you will understand in just a few seconds. While reading my letter, I would like you to join me in an imaginary journey where we could place ourselves in the lives of other young people.

Every child has the right to a family – the first meaningful context of life that develops the child's personality, source of love and respect, of solidarity and affection, the foundation of a civilised society. I wish that all children would live as I do: growing next to people who matter and offer emotional and financial support.

There is nothing more beautiful than to think of your family when you are tired and exhausted at school: your mother preparing the meal, your father welcoming you with love and warmth and your brothers sharing their joys! All these small and simple things do not happen in the life of abandoned or vulnerable children. They have never felt the joy of it!

They do not know what a hug or a home is, how to receive good words or encouragements. Let's just think that for just one day, one single day, we would exchange places. How would that make you feel? Could you live without the good food of your mother, the optimistic words of your father, the love of your brothers... could you live for just one day, one month, a year... a lifetime? Could you grow up without having anyone that misses you?

In Romania there are many children whose parents have left to find work abroad. They live without knowing how to smile or love. PARENTS ARE IRREPLACEABLE! For a majority of children, these are just dreams. It is the same for children who have been abandoned in orphanages or in the boundaries of their homes because of financial struggles.

Let us have heart! Let us offer from our hearts and think of the ones around us! What cost to us to offer just a little of our affection? As little as it may be, it would be a great joy for them! Let us care for those around us! Let us make this world a better place! Let us find a family for these children! Let us teach them what true love and education are! Let us fight indifference!

Some adults may not realise how important family is. For these children, it is a hidden treasure. Let us give each child the chance to have a family!

Respectfully and trustfully yours,

*Cezara, 17 years old*

LETTER  
**17** Romania

“In Romania there are many children whose parents have left to find work abroad. They live without knowing how to smile or love. PARENTS ARE IRREPLACEABLE! For a majority of children, these are just dreams. It is the same for children who have been abandoned in orphanages or in the boundaries of their homes because of financial struggles.”



*Cezara, 17 years old*

Sierra Leone

LETTER

18

Alfred, 16 years old



“As we celebrate the CRC, let us remember the girls who have been made to suffer for the rest of their lives through FGM and join hands together to stop those who are at risk of going through FGM.”



SECOND CLASS  
AIR MAIL

Dear Friends,

My name is Alfred – 16 years old. I am a member of the Matru Jong Kids Club in Sierra Leone. It is with heavy heart that I write to articulate an entitlement that children in Sierra Leone have been robbed of for ages.

It may sound interesting to hear a male voice angered by child female genital mutilation (FGM), which mainly affects girls in Sierra Leone. To all of you reading this piece, may I ask you to please pause for a minute and pray for all those girls who have died whilst going through FGM – may their souls rest in peace, amen. I am angered because they are my sisters, because they deserve dignity, because they deserve to remain complete, because they are made vulnerable, and because I want to be a voice for them. According to tradition, FGM is an acceptable practice that over 95 per cent of rural girls may need to go through in order to be accepted in society. It prepares girls to be ready for marriage and reduces promiscuity among them. However, at the end of the day, it is the parents who benefit from the process as they receive a bride price for their girls who have gone through FGM at the expense of their education. These girls end up dropping out of school, become pregnant, and some die during child birth. This process puts girls into pain forever.

As we celebrate the CRC, let us remember the girls who have been made to suffer for the rest of their lives through FGM and join hands together to stop those who are at risk of going through FGM.

I hereby call on the government of Sierra Leone to put an end to the pain of our girls by legislating against FGM and to follow the good example of other countries where the dignity of girls has remained complete.

It is only with this that my anger and the anger of many other children can be turned into forever happiness.

Thank you.

Alfred, 16 years old

Greetings from Cambodia!

On behalf of children in Cambodia I would like to send warm greetings to all children around the world. This year marks 25 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I am very happy to have a good chance to share my experiences on what we have learned and lived in terms of our rights situation as well as the challenges that we face in my country.

My name is Srey, 17 years old. I am the oldest sister with one sister and one brother. I am a Youth Group leader in Kandal province. I have attended many training courses organised by World Vision; Child Rights is one amongst them. I understood well about child rights. I knew that children have the right to live, the right to be protected, the right to development and the right to participation. I know that I have had these rights. After I attended this course in 2010, I continued teaching the children in my communities about their rights because previously I saw many kind of common issues in my village related to child protection due to lack of education; children are vulnerable to abuses such as child labour, domestic violence and rape. Poverty and corruption force most students, especially female students, to drop out before finishing secondary school. In many families children play an important role in family survival, helping with various tasks such as farming and selling their labour. Up to now, there are about 80 children (girls: 55, boys: 25) who have learned about child rights from me. In addition, I taught them literacy, numeracy, drawing, song, hygiene, morality, the Peace Road curriculum for children, and personal safety.

When I started teaching the children, my neighbours and the parents of the children didn't support me. They criticised me and didn't value me, but after they have seen their children demonstrate some changes such as working hard, studying hard, the ability to think broader, going to school regularly and having more confidence, they then started motivating and encouraging their children to go to school. They don't use violence but start using soft and sweet words to their children, and also they have talked about good points of their children with the neighbours.

Beside teaching children, I have also participated in many activities such as role play to educate communities and children not to drop out of school, on child sexual abuse, and a campaign to encourage parents to register and send their children to school. I also educated parents about nutritious food and joined a public forum on child labour. I believe these activities have awakened the community to pay more attention to the children.

Thank you, World Vision, for implementing in my village and commune. The children in my community understand and are aware of their rights now. In the future I want to be a teacher and help my community through working with World Vision.

Thank you.  
Yours sincerely,  
Srey, 17 years old



Srey, 17 years old

RETURN RECEIPT REQUIRED

REGISTERED

NO



“Thank you, World Vision, for implementing in my village and commune. The children in my community understand and are aware of their rights now. In the future I want to be a teacher and help my community through working with World Vision.”





Kajal,  
16 years  
old

मिमी नेपाल  
मंगी बाल  
को अधिकारको  
सम्बन्धमा  
को कक्षा हुनी  
होला, दुर्गम  
त पुगेको हो  
सहायता  
काई बाल  
सुयोग पुगेको  
लेर हात  
न कालकाजिक  
कार्यक्रम  
मि काल  
देख्नकायो  
हात  
आ.सि.द  
नेट विनि  
देख्ना  
काक रिपका  
कालकाजिका  
हा  
मज काम  
मागि  
हजलाई  
मार्त भए  
उपम  
भन्नेका  
नी

“I would like to request my government to implement effectively all the policies and laws that are made for children to support all the children for their bright future.”

I, Kajal, 16 years, am writing this letter from Nepal. I want to express my sincere thanks to you for making the CRC in welfare of children. Guidelines of the CRC have been supported in our country to handle issues related to children.

In our country child rights is in implementation that has been helpful for the children involved in a child club. The members of a child club get opportunity to participate in different activities like school enrolment campaign and awareness-raising activities in relation to education, health, sanitation and child protection.

Now, in my village the Village Development Committee (VDC) has allocated a budget for the children. Village Child Protection and Promotion Committees have been formed under VDC. They are actively working for children's rights and protections. They have good impact in areas of child empowerment and advocacy for their rights and protection.

In VDC-level meeting children get an opportunity to participate. These kinds of events have supported sensitising children on seeking their rights and also fulfilling their responsibilities. My friends and I are actively involved in a child club and working to stop child marriage.

Even though our government has made different laws in connection to children, the poor economic condition of the family has resulted in children deprived of the opportunity to acquire education, enjoy good health and fulfil basic needs.

Urbanisation and traditional practices have also supported continuation of child marriage. Ultimately it has adverse effects in reproductive health of mothers and creates critical issues in child health. In my areas open borders have contributed to child labour and child trafficking.

Hereby, I would like to request my government to implement effectively all the policies and laws that are made for children to support all the children for their bright future.

To ensure the rights of children, involving children in a child club, organising interaction meetings among children on child rights, doing awareness-raising events and advocacy for child rights will support children to achieve their rights.

Thank you!  
Kajal, 16 years old



Hello, I am Claudia from El Salvador.

I want to tell you that I am very happy that I am able to communicate with you since this is very special date, the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is special because it reminds me that 25 years ago for the first time people start believing in us. In this opportunity I want to talk about the rights that I am very glad have been taken into account to generate this law. This is really important in order to have integral rights and these are the rights to participation and to education.

Participation is a fundamental right in the lives of boys, girls and adolescents. This convention recognises us for the first time in international law as subjects of rights, as people who are able to contribute to the society and to defend our rights, and not just as objects of protection. This has been one of the big achievements that we obtained because before we were perceived just as objects that just needed protection. However, this convention has changed that paradigm and has given us the protagonist role that we must have in our society.

I would like to tell you that one big progress that the convention has had is more access to education. My grandfather used to tell me that the education was just for boys, and his sisters were deprived of education (as happened to the majority of girls). They were taught just to take care of the households. This is no longer like that, since education is our right.

The convention is reaching 25 years, and I believe the main challenge continues to be the lack of dissemination of this law from the states. Many boys and girls still don't know that they have a law that guarantees our integral development. In 25 years we can see several advances from the states in order to ensure that our participation is effective. However, our society is still not taking us seriously, and the adults act under the mindset that we are incapable people and they don't trust our abilities. They don't open spaces where we can have a real participation.

We ask our governments that in all social programmes implemented to develop the country, we should be taken seriously, since we can contribute enormously to the transformation that our country needs. We can also enjoy our right to education, and it is necessary that the state creates the conditions needed to benefit from the right. In order to have quality participation spaces, we need to have quality education, since both rights are complementary.

*Claudia, 17 years old*

“We ask our governments that in all social programmes implemented to develop the country, we should be taken seriously, since we can contribute enormously to the transformation that our country needs.”



*Claudia,  
17 years old*

India

LETTER  
**22**



“The country’s decision makers should encourage the teachers to give special attention to vulnerable children. They should find out the vulnerable students and provide incentives for their continuing education.”



**Jhumuri, centre,  
17 years old**



I, Miss Jhumuri from India, convey my hearty gratitude to World Vision for selecting me as a representative for vulnerable children. By the inspirations, efforts and assistance of World Vision I am able to become more confident. I am now studying in Intermediate (+2 1st year arts). I am 17 years old. I am a sponsored child, and I always attend the Children Get Together and Children Club meeting, conducted by World Vision. There I have been taught the child rights by World Vision staff. Among the four basic child rights – right to survival, right to protection, right to development and right to participation – I like the right to education under the right to development.

When I was 8 years old I lost my eyesight by a truck accident. I underwent medical treatment one year ago. By knowing the school progress of my friends, I got interested to start my education again. So I learned Braille in a school for two years. Then I joined the general school and studied from class 6th to 10th. But Braille books are available only up to class 7th. So, after class 7th, I found it difficult to adjust in the general school as it was not possible to remember all the teachings of all the teachers.

I shared my problems and requirements with World Vision staff, and the World Vision project has provided one Braille typewriter and a recording device to me for improving my study. It helped me to fulfil my rights to education, to continue my school education and to pass the board examination of class 10th. I became the source of inspiration to other vulnerable children by attending the state OurVoice programme, South Asia Child Right Convention and Triennial Council at Tanzania.

Even though the CRC exists, still the rights are not taken seriously by people. When I wanted to attend the general school, the teachers were not happy because they have to give special attention to me. I wanted to participate in competitions, but teachers did not allow me. In college, there is no special choice to take the optional subjects. No Braille books are printed for class 8th to 10th by the government.

I had the opportunity to attend the World Vision board meeting in June 2014. There I put my suggestions forward in the decision making of adults. My suggestions are that the blind students should get a Braille typewriter and recording device, that Braille books be printed for students above class 7th and that there should be collaboration between World Vision and the National Blind Association. The country’s decision makers should encourage the teachers to give special attention to vulnerable children. They should find out the vulnerable students and provide incentives for their continuing education.

Lastly, I want to encourage all the vulnerable brothers and sisters to hope for a good future. I encourage them to avail themselves of the right to education facilities, to continue education. Education will help us to be self-dependent, self-employed and employed. We are not a burden to our parents and society.

*Jhumuri, 17 years old*

## DO WE REALLY HAVE WHAT WE SHOULD HAVE?

It was a certain 16 January 2009, when I was almost 9 years old, that I learned for the first time during an awareness campaign for children in my school organised by UNICEF that a child also has RIGHTS. Personally, this sounded very strange to me as the child in my culture and my community has always been considered as a human being who has no opinion or point of view to express and is supposed to exclusively obey all the demands of his parents and other family members.

Since then, a new way of life was born inside of me, the way of wanting to know enough on the provisions of the protection of the child, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and to understand them. This perfect understanding of the rights of the child as mentioned in the CRC has positively influenced me in order to sound the alarm, speak out and never remain silent where the rights of the child are violated in my community. This commitment is the reason why I joined the Children's Parliament (PARDE) in 2011, but also the drive that pushes me to write today in order to compare between the commitments taken by my country, the DRC, by ratifying the CRC and the true realities of everyday life of the Congolese child 25 years later.

It sickens me greatly to find every day on the streets of my town of N'sele, the village of Kinshasa, hundreds of children aged 6 to 17 who are economically exploited by selling water in packets called Mayi, Chikwangue, vegetables and different objects; others are working hard, under the sun and during the day, in sand and gravel extraction sites and in mineral deposits (in Katanga). These are children for whom schooling has no meaning any more since they already know the taste of money and work for the survival of their families, are deprived of their right to education (art 28, CRC) and are completely unprotected against risky work that is susceptible of harming their health as well as their physical and mental development (art 32, CRC).

It is definite that access to education has improved considerably in my community with the efforts of the government and its partners; however, the free primary education as needed by the CRC is not yet effective all over the country, especially in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi! On the other hand, the quality of teaching given has but decreased (the baseline investigations organised in my community by World Vision proved that only 8 per cent of children who finish primary school can read, write and calculate). In addition, I regret to note that in the twenty-first century there are still schools in my town and my country where children study even on the ground!

It is in vital need that I take advantage of this commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the CRC to remind the decision makers in my country of actually engaging in the improvement of the welfare of the Congolese child, knowing that even our constitution of February 18, 2006, in its article 123, item 16, provides a central place for the child with regards to the development of the human being and life.

page 2

This commitment of our government that we are all waiting for is without a doubt one that links the promises to the acts, and that can be expressed, for example, by increasing the budget allocated for the health sector in order to build health and hydraulic infrastructures, establishing a national parliament for children that will be based in one of the two halls of the parliament in order to be consulted in advance on all matters concerning children and provincial parliaments, guaranteeing the free complaint made by a child, consequently sensitising the parents and local leaders on the rights of the child, equally taking into consideration the questions related to the quality of teaching, and stabilising the eastern part of my country because, without peace, no project is possible. In summary, have the matter of the child who is the future of tomorrow as a priority among all.

It is also an opportunity to remind the international community of actually wanting to develop an additional protocol to the CRC on taxable sanctions for all states who have not made the effort to actually implement the rights of the child as ratified.

Jenny, 16 years old

**“This perfect understanding of the rights of the child as mentioned in the CRC has positively influenced me in order to sound the alarm, speak out and never remain silent where the rights of the child are violated in my community.”**





“Today's child is the future of tomorrow. If so, how necessary it is to take good care of the children who are orphans and have no family. Their elders, society leaders and moreover the government should care for them. But is that what we see?”



Human beings possess dreams of a bright opportunity for their future. It is the hope of every human being to live fostering this dream. But there are thousands with dreams who cannot enter through the door of opportunity. The dreams remain mere dreams. Poverty is the main reason that hinders humans from reaching their destination.

I have seen this with my friend Zakir. The incident was one year ago. Zakir, a student of class nine, did not come to school for some days. Examinations were approaching. One day as I was going to school I noticed that he was sitting alone on the back bench. 'What's up Zakir?' He replies: 'I think I can never come to school again. My mother died when I was young, and my father also died some days ago. I have no one. I have to work now. If I come to school without working, I will remain unfed. So I can't come to school regularly.' On hearing this incident we, his friends, felt hurt and wanted to do something for him. So discussing with the teachers we managed a scholarship from 'Brozendra Chandra Das-fund'. As a result he continued his studies. Poverty cannot affect him.

Now, I want to tell you about one of our classmates, Rupali. It was almost two years ago. Suddenly, she got married at an early age when she was in grade eight. But she had the intention of studying more, so she used to come to school in secret after marriage. Seeing her interest in education we discussed with the teachers and told her parents to send her to school on a regular basis. First they do not agree, but when we informed them about the law they agreed. At last, her parents agreed to send Rupali to get in the class regularly, and she is continuing her education.

'Today's child is the future of tomorrow.' If so, how necessary it is to take good care of the children who are orphans and have no family. Their elders, society leaders and moreover the government should care for them. But is that what we see? Now that is the worthy question. It is not like that for children if they are poor and abandoned; they will never enjoy their rights or a decent life.

Now I urge all the rich and leading citizens of our society to please find children like Zakir and Rupali amongst your surroundings and stretch out your kind and helpful hand to them so that their rights can be established and our vision is finally a reality.

*Mokarram, 16 years old*

The Convention [on the Rights of the Child] is celebrating 25 years, and it is thanks to it that children's and adolescents' rights are guaranteed. Due to this convention, Brazil created the Statute of Children and Adolescents (ECA).

It is a time to celebrate AND a time to fight too.

Through ECA we are guaranteed the rights to health and education, which are free to all and where part of the funds raised through taxes is invested. However, education needs to be improved. We do not have enough kindergartens; and schools have low quality. Regarding health, we have hospitals, but with poor service and lack of doctors.

An important fact is that we have a supervisory agency to guarantee that our rights are not violated. Nevertheless, our children and adolescents who are taken for 'socio-educational measures'<sup>1</sup> have their rights violated. Some of them are being beaten and living like prisoners.

Therefore, we, as members of MJPOP Brazil, demand the following points for more children's and adolescents' rights:

- 1 – Improve teachers' wages, school structure and food offered to students.
- 2 – Expand and improve basic health centres and certify the service providers.
- 3 – Improve the socio-educational measures system, so that adolescent offenders are guided and recovered.

*Luciene, 17 years old*

<sup>1</sup> Brazil's criminal justice system has instituted socio-educational measures for juvenile crime. They range from admonition, obligation to repair the damages, community service, probation, semi-liberty and internment. Of the approximately 60,000 teenagers who are subject to socio-educational measures in Brazil, around 18,000 (about 30 per cent) have been given prison sentences or are being held in prison prior to trial or sentencing and held in one of 288 internment institutes. See A. Yamamoto & N. Bou ças do Lago, Teenagers in Conflict with the Law and Justice in Brazil, <http://f3magazine.unicri.it/?p=74>.

**“We do not have enough kindergartens; and schools have low quality. Regarding health, we have hospitals, but with poor service and lack of doctors.”**



**Luciene writes her letter on behalf of the children of Brazil.**

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