



On the Record for Children

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From the AP Editorial Desk

Poverty is the Biggest Obstacle to Child Rights, Says UN Secretary General by Sara Friedman

The widening gap between rich and poor, the increase in chronic and absolute poverty, and the sharp drop in development aid are the biggest threats to moving the children's agenda forward, according to a new report by the UN Secretary General.

The 140-page report is entitled 'We the Children: End-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children.' It was discussed yesterday at the opening plenary session of the PrepCom and will form the basis of discussion throughout the week.

The report acknowledges that the world has seen more gains against poverty in the past 50 years than in the last five hundred, and more progress for children in the past decade than in any other

period. Nonetheless, it warns, chronic poverty will be the greatest obstacle to meeting the needs and rights of children.

If the international community falls short of achieving most of the goals of the World Summit for Children, it will not be because they were too ambitious or beyond reach, but because of insufficient investment. With a few exceptions, developing countries devoted only about 12 to 14 percent of their national budgets to basic services during the 1990's, while donors allocated only 10-11 percent of their declining aid budgets. 'Never in the modern history of development cooperation have we seen overall aid to the world's neediest countries fall to such low levels as they have in recent years,' says the report.

In spite of its sombre message on poverty, delegates referred to the Report with enthusiasm during the session. Some told On the Record that it was far stronger than the Outcome document.

The Report details progress, setbacks and new challenges to the rights of children in a wide range of areas, including health, violence, economic exploitation and the devastating HIV/AIDS pandemic.

- Copies of the report (A/S-27/3) are available on the UN website or at the UN Document Center.

US Conservatives Push For Another Intersessional by Adam Frankel & Gabrielle Engh

The US government and conservative pro-family groups are hoping to see another Intersessional discussion on the Outcome document after the PrepCom ends on Friday, according to a series of background interviews conducted by On The Record.

American conservative pro-family groups have repeatedly voiced their opposition to the current document. Austin Ruse, President of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute (C-Fam), told On the Record that 'we want a line-by-line negotiation.'

'The problem is that we have a non-negotiated document,' he said. C-Fam is an ECOSOC-accredited NGO.

Sources close to the US delegation say that the US government favours a paragraph-by-paragraph review of the Outcome document. In the view of many PrepCom delegates, this could amount to a full negotiation and might indeed necessitate an Intersessional meeting after the end of the PrepCom. The prospect of prolonging the discussion and reopening the debate on the document would certainly alarm the Bureau. Thomas Hammarberg, Special Advisor to the Swedish government on humanitarian issues, told a meeting of the NGO's Child Rights Caucus on Monday that the conference Bureau is 'determined to finish by Friday.'

NGOs would be concerned because they would be denied access to an Intersessional meeting. 'We'd be worried if there is an Intersessional [after Friday],' said Bill Bell, of the Child Rights Caucus. 'Civil society would not be involved. That would be regrettable.'

Meanwhile, a conservative pro-family group, Focus on the Family, has launched a campaign that calls on governments to de-ratify the CRC. In an email message that has been circulated to pro-life groups, Mr. Ruse urges that they 'spread the word' about the deratification Campaign.

Ruse told On the Record that he rejects the CRC as the framework for the Outcome document. Ruse also argues that the rights of parents and families are not adequately addressed in the Outcome document.

Ruse worked on the pro-life Holy See Campaign at the UN with Mr William Saunders, a member of the US delegation and a representative of the Family Research Council. In an article on his organization's website, Saunders attacked what he views as the 'anti-life and anti-family' bias at the United Nations.

Two Views on the Child Friendly Outcome Document by Yelena Ovcharenko

Children attending the 3rd PrepCom are split on the 'child-friendly' version of the Outcome Document, written by NGOs in an effort to make the Document more accessible to children.

The child-friendly document was written by Save The Children, and was the focus of last weekend's Under-18 Youth Meeting, hosted by UNICEF.

The European and US children support the original Outcome document, while the Spanish, Chinese, and French speakers prefer the child-friendly version. This appears to stem from language barriers that may prevent full comprehension of the original statement. Children with a large vocabulary in English find the child-friendly version too simple. 'The child-friendly version grabs your attention visually and encourages you to read on; however, its simplicity makes it boring,' stated 17-year-old Stephanie from Costa Rica.

On the other hand, most non-native English speakers think that the original document's complicated language makes it harder to understand the issues presented. 'When I look at the child-friendly version, I completely understand the document because the sentences aren't long and the language is simple,' said 17 year-old Ariel from China.

Despite their differences, the children find it important to have access to both documents so that all may have a thorough understanding of the issues, allowing them to be actively involved in producing the final document.

Viewpoint: David and Goliath

Someone once said that children are the future. Politicians especially like using this phrase in election periods or when an important international meeting comes up. But they seem to be saying a lot and doing nothing. I think that children are not only the future but the very present, and without a healthy present you cannot have a better future. We will have no future at all.

In 1990, the world governments met here in New York to talk about the world's children. This meeting was attended by both leaders, and by children, with the children offering bouquets of flowers to the heads of state. They were mere tokens. Moving puppets. Eleven years later, another world summit is taking place. It's the first time that young people are part of their governments' delegations and are offered a chance to express their opinions.

Before this third PrepCom, a series of regional meetings took place around the world, attended by children delegates that were elected by their peers at local levels.

One representative from each of these regional meetings was sent here to New York to express their opinions before the heads of state and heads of delegations. The first occasion to do so came yesterday, behind closed doors.

Some youth representatives were more formal, some spoke more freely, but the overall idea was that something has to be done, and it has to be done NOW.

Young people feel an acute need for participation and for the creation of shadow youth governments to countervote the governments' decisions regarding young people. As Yvonne from Kenya said: 'We don't want our own Mercedes and our own villas, we just want our voices heard.' The children raised different issues in the plenary that need to be addressed immediately, such as the need for a more effective fight against AIDS, as noted by the Marakesch delegate. The Berlin representative expressed the urgent need to eliminate discrimination, the need for governments to put children on panels when discussing budgets and provisions, and the need for joint efforts to release children from the claws of poverty.

The fact that we had the chance to talk in front of the heads of state and the very fact that we are here today is an awesome thing, but I think there's a long way to go. At yesterday's meeting, the adult delegates got lost in pointless arguments, including how many children should be allowed in a national delegation. Off the record, one ambassador stated it best, 'It's a country's right to decide, but the more young people present, the better.'

However, for each country that understands the role of children and promotes their rights, there is another one that does not, and thereby denies their children their basic rights.

A particularly brutal example of this was the removal of the Outcome Document chapter forbidding corporal punishment of children. The reason for this, as one official expressed, is that one government did not agree with it. One country alone has made it acceptable for all children to be mistreated by their parents.

I heard someone say today at the cafeteria that there is a fight between the young people's points of views and the government delegations' points of view. Well, today young people are the David to the governments' Goliath.

And don't forget that David defeated Goliath.

- This viewpoint was submitted by Vadim Alexandru Pungulescu, 17 years old, from România. He is Chief Editor of Save the Children România's magazine, 'Children's Thoughts and Voices.' He's representing România at the PrepCom on behalf of the Berlin-Budapest-Bucharest conferences.

'Significant Improvement' in New Draft Outcome Document Says Child Rights Caucus by On the Record Staff

The new revised draft Outcome document will help to better integrate the Convention on the Rights of the Child into the Special Session according to the Child Rights Caucus.

The latest revisions were made public Monday and discussed at a packed meeting of the Child Rights Caucus, where they were generally well received. At the same time, the Caucus is concerned that the draft Outcome document does not explicitly set the goal of strengthening the Convention.

Bill Bell told the Caucus meeting that the Caucus has been 'remarkably successful' in getting child rights mainstreamed into the document. 'There have been significant improvements in relation to the Convention [on the Rights of the Child] (CRC) and the goals of fulfilling child rights.'

The Caucus is particularly pleased with the fact that the new draft calls for national and regional action plans to be based on the CRC as well as the Plan of Action that will be adopted by the Special Session. This will help to ensure that the Special Session does not create a 'parallel' agenda to the human rights treaties.

This is new, and according to a new position paper that was released by the Caucus late on Monday, it will 'ensure that the Plan of Action is more clearly integrated to the implementation of the Convention [on the Rights of the Child].'

At the same time, child rights advocates are concerned that the draft Outcome document does not make it clear that the main goal is to ensure full implementation of the Convention. The Caucus is also concerned that the eradication of poverty is still not adequately addressed. 'We strongly support efforts to increase the mobilisation of national and international resources in support of the realization of child rights, including the development of an equitable and non-discriminatory world trade regime.'

Adolescents Miss Out, Warn NGOs by Rachel Watson

Eight prominent NGOs have sent letters to UNICEF chief Carol Bellamy and the Special Session Bureau chair Ambassador Durant of Jamaica complaining that the current draft of the outcome document fails to address the specific needs of adolescents.

One of the letters was sent Monday by seven prominent organizations.

'We remain concerned that there continues to be insufficient explicit mention of adolescents,' it says. The group comprises the World Alliance of YMCAs, World YWCA, the World Organization of the Scout Movement, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, International Award Association and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The International Planned Parenthood Federation sent a separate letter.

The letter from the seven groups acknowledged that changes made to the draft document had strengthened references to adolescents, but added that more emphasis needed to be made on the specific concerns of older youth, 'in order to emphasise to governments that respecting and protecting the rights of children in their second decade of life requires quite different approaches than meeting the rights of small children.'

IPPF and the group of seven NGOs work very closely with adolescents worldwide and expressed hope the document would appeal to the needs and hopes of their older youth members and volunteers, especially in the areas of reproductive health, education and participation

Adolescent health concerns were raised by the Rio Group of Latin American nations in discussions last week, and the NGOs hope to gain the support of other national delegations, including the European Union. But with some delegations reluctant to add further changes to the existing draft, the NGOs admit they could face an uphill struggle.

'This is more than pure linguistics,' said Jessica Nott of the International Planned Parenthood Federation. 'In the whole of the first section and in the declaration there's no mention of adolescents, it's all about nurturing the child. It's very paternalistic.' IPPF is spearheading the campaign to reinforce references to adolescents in the outcome document.

South Asian NGOs 'Feel Excluded' From the Special Session Process **by Sara Friedman**

Although South Asia is the region with the largest number of children in the world, the voice of South Asian NGOs is barely being heard in the run up to the UN Special Session, according to NGO representatives from the region.

South Asian NGOs made their dissatisfaction heard at the consultation on Sunday. South Asia was the only region that failed to deliver a report. The reason, said NGOs, was that there had been no NGO Regional Consultation – and hence no report. The only major regional meeting that took place was the high level government and corporate sector South Asia Consultation 'Investing in Children' in Kathmandu in May. NGOs were neither involved in the process nor invited to the meeting.

'This cannot help but have a big impact on the outcome document' said Razia Ismail of the Indian NGO, Women's Coalition for Peace and Development. She added that regional meetings without NGO representation are unlikely to reflect the concerns of the region which has the 'the largest number of children and the largest number of problems. The voices of NGOs are not being heard.' To add to the problem, South Asian NGOs and young people are under-represented at this PrepCom.

Acknowledging that the NGOs may have been part of the problem, a group of 27 NGOs met in New Delhi. They sent a message to the PrepCom which has become known as the Delhi Message. The message acknowledges the efforts of governments in the region to address trafficking, child labour, gender justice and other key issues, the message notes the serious setbacks during the past decade. It takes governments to task for weakness of political will, and market forces that have brought hardship to millions of people and force governments to cut back on social spending, increasing the marginalization of millions of South Asian children.

The 27 NGOs are called 'The NGO Alliance of People of Faith on the Rights of the Child.' The Alliance has members in Sri Lanka, Azerbaijan and Jordan and is itself a member of the Global Network of Religions for Children – a grouping that was created in Japan.

The lack of NGO involvement in the process could lessen pressure on governments to honour their commitments to the World Summit for Children and the CRC, said Ismail. All the deadlines for National Plans of Action have slipped and South Asian countries that have signed onto the CRC may not feel the pressure to implement it. Without regional support, UNICEF country offices may follow suit.

According to the Delhi message, 'South Asian children are a majority group among children in the world, in rights, needs and aspirations; their status and dignity must receive due recognition in the decisions now being negotiated for children.'

A strong message, but one that would be far stronger if they were here to argue their own cause in person.

Punishing the Innocent by Peter Lippman

Many child rights advocates would like the Outcome document to demand greater protection for children who are caught up in the justice system. Some governments are skeptical: they feel that as the age of the criminal falls, so the law has to respond. In the United States, this thinking even applies to illegal immigrants, whose 'crime' is often to have flown persecution in their own country. Not only are they treated like criminals and locked up – they are deliberately denied access to lawyers and information. Peter Lippman recently visited a legal aid center in Washington State to learn more.

Each year, approximately 200,000 would-be immigrants are detained by the INS on suspicion of illegal entry to the United States. Of these, around 5,000 are minors and many enter the country alone. The average age is 16, but there are cases of children as young as 18 months being held. They are young. They are innocent. Yet they are treated like criminals.

This angers and upsets child advocates. 'People have a sense that if you've come across the border as an undocumented person, you've committed a crime,' says Nieves Negrete, director of the Washington Alliance for Immigrant & Refugee Justice, in Washington State. 'But more and more, children are coming to the United States by themselves, as unaccompanied minors. It has become a question of survival. If they are from Central or South America, they are escaping

poverty, natural disasters, or genocide. There are a lot of reasons, none of which is that they're coming to take advantage of our welfare system.'

Arrested and Tortured

The story of Markus, a young man from East Africa, illustrates the perils that can face a desperate young immigrant who lands in the United States illegally. Markus' grandfather was killed for organizing an opposition political party. His mother was killed too, and several of his cousins were arrested and beaten. Then the same thing happened to Markus. When he tried to express his political opinions he was arrested and tortured. At the time, Markus (not his real name) was seventeen years old.

When Markus was released from prison after six months, he decided to flee his country by stowing away on a ship – any ship. He found his way into the hold of a big boat and hid there. When he crept out five days later, starving, and announced himself to the captain, he learned that he was on a United States Navy vessel. The captain brought Markus to Seattle, Washington. There, he became an 'unaccompanied alien child' in the custody of the INS, with all the woes that that status entails.

Markus had an airtight case for political asylum, but the INS authorities did not advise him of this. Nor did they tell him that, as a juvenile, he may be eligible for 'Special Immigrant Juvenile Status' (SIJS) which can be available to abused and neglected immigrant children. Instead, they locked him up in a juvenile detention center in Eastern Washington, and waited until he turned eighteen. Today, Markus sits in the INS immigration detention center in Seattle.

Markus's story is a classic example of the problems facing immigrant children in INS custody. First and foremost, they are treated like criminals and locked up or deported.

Locked Up

There are various ways that a minor may legitimize residence status in the United States. In addition to asylum, one may also have close family in the country, be eligible for an immigration amnesty, or even already be a citizen without knowing it. However, as noted by Atieno Odhiambo, attorney for the Washington State-based Columbia Legal Services, 'Every time I talk to INS representatives, they remind me that they are in the business of deporting people.'

Those that are not deported usually end up in jail. The *Flores v. Reno* nationwide class-action lawsuit filed against the INS led to a 1998 settlement that established policy for the detention, release, and treatment of minors held by the INS. Under the *Flores* settlement, the INS is prohibited from locking up minors together with juvenile criminals for longer than 72 hours, unless the child has been convicted of a crime. However, under an 'emergency influx' loophole, the INS has for many years incarcerated at least a third of the several thousand minors it detains each year.

Chris Nugent of the American Bar Association Immigration Project says, 'The enforcement mentality means that the children [detainees] are not being treated as clients but prisoners. There

are people in service branch with a very prosecutorial approach to providing benefits. So there needs to be greater professionalization.'

Such abuses led attorney Amy Krantz of the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project to say, 'The INS is an absolutely renegade agency...There's such impunity, violations of due process, and no effective way to hold them to the law.' This impunity is reinforced by the fact that in 1996, the US Congress took significant jurisdiction in the process for appealing immigration case decisions away from the Federal court system, making it impossible to appeal many case decisions. This rendered a similarity between 'INS justice' and 'military justice.'

Denied Counsel

The third, and in some ways, most serious problem is the lack of legal representation. Anyone charged with criminal offenses is required to have counsel. But the same safeguard is not afforded to those in civil cases, and immigration offenses are covered by civil law. While juveniles in custody are entitled to representation if they can afford it and take the initiative to obtain it, it is very rare that the INS will inform them of their rights. Only around ten percent of detained immigrants receive legal counsel.

This is more serious for children than adults, according to Mike Bochenek, staff member of the children's project at Human Rights Watch. 'Adults need a lawyer to understand their rights. With kids, they need counsel even more so, because they are not able to participate in the formation of their case. They need the guidance of an attorney they can trust.'

A Georgetown University study reports that an immigrant who receives legal representation is 'more than six times as likely to be granted asylum from an Immigration Judge as someone who is un-represented.'

Remedy on the Way?

Senator Diane Feinstein is sponsoring a bill that would go a long way towards solving these ills. This bill, S.121 or the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act of 2001, would separate the functions of care-giver and prosecutor by creating a new division under the Department of Justice, an Office of Children's Services. This office would ensure that unaccompanied immigrant children have the same access to legal counsel and court-appointed guardians that U.S. children have.

The bill, due for deliberation by Congress in July, would also establish new standards for the treatment of children in detention, provide immigration-related training for social service workers and juvenile court officials, and expand shelter facilities and foster care programs for detained children. The bill's provisions attempt to re-orient the emphasis of treatment of minors from detention to alternative placement.

Existing United States law that protects immigrant children is reinforced by international agreements. Prominently, Article 37 the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (signed by

the United States but not ratified) states that detention of children (whether asylum-seekers or migrants) should be used only as a measure of last resort.

The United States has ratified treaties protecting the rights of detainees: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1992), and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1994). Both of these treaties prohibit arbitrary detention, but they do not specifically address the needs of young asylum seekers like Markus.

The best and easiest way for the United States to respect the rights of young people would be to ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Youth Participation: Ideas From Jamaica by Peter Lippman

Twenty-year-old Kelvin Kerr of Jamaica has a suggestion for how to solve the problems of young people in his country: 'participation and more participation.' Kelvin should know, because he is an active member of a youth NGO in Jamaica's Eastern Zone. Kelvin was chosen by his government to be Youth Ambassador in Jamaica's delegation to this week's PrepCom.

The drafters of the Outcome document would do well to pay attention to Kelvin's words. He says, 'We need to get children more involved in the decision-making process, because government – older people – sit in a big room and make decisions about us. But they should ask us what our biggest concerns are. If they did that, it would make a difference.'

Kelvin works with the Eastern Zone Child Support Committee, based in his home town of Port More. Children there have problems that, according to Kelvin, threaten to get very serious. Kelvin lists unemployment, poverty, teenage pregnancy, and crime as the top problems that plague youth of Jamaica.

A vicious cycle makes it difficult for Jamaican families to rise out of poverty. Kelvin says, 'There is frustration among the youth. There is not a lot of opportunity for a job. You leave school, and try to get a job, but there is a clause that says you need experience. But you can't get experience without getting a job.'

Kelvin has ideas that would break the cycle of unemployment. He proposes that the requirement for experience be waived for people just out of school 'Companies should be required to take on ten students for summer work. The cost of university is prohibitive. I would like to study management information systems, but I can't get a loan. There should be more scholarship programs. Companies like Cable & Wireless Jamaica should give scholarships.'

The Eastern Zone organization has 30 members, aged 12 to 24. The organization does fundraising to provide food and clothing to poor children. It also goes to elementary schools to give workshops on children's rights. Kelvin says, 'The students have basic rights – the right to education, to free speech – but they don't know about these rights.'

Kelvin joined the Eastern Zone organization and became an activist 'because I went to school and saw the problems, and I joined to help solve them. There are kids who come to school without lunch money. I don't think that you can learn if you are hungry. Sometimes you could hear gunshots from the school, in the community. Then you couldn't leave the school, because it wasn't safe.'

If the drafters of the Outcome document would like to know what to listen for when talking to young people, Kelvin's proposal for a 'school awareness workshop' is a good example. Kelvin sees young people who are trained in issues of birth control going into the schools to teach their peers. 'We do listen to adults, but sometimes adults point a finger and talk at us, instead of talking with us. So let youth talk.'

'Every year, many girls get pregnant here. So we should put in place a program of awareness about sex and pregnancy. We need to talk to people of our own age about sex. There needs to be a forum with youth, with the right answers, to share information. For example, people say that if you have sex in the water, or standing up, you won't get pregnant.'

The drafters of the Outcome document would do well to listen to youth participants such as Kelvin. Everyone must be engaged in incorporating their insights and ideas into this process.

Profile: Lucy Mason, Strong in Spirit

Next year Lucy Mason will attend drama school to pursue her interest in the arts. Right now, she is at the PrepCom as an advocate for children's rights.

Lucy has 'brittle bones' disease, a congenital disease. But she is not at the PrepCom as an advocate for disabled young people-she is here as an advocate for all young people.

'Just because disability affects me, it's not the only thing I care about,' she said. 'I'm here because I want to show that it matters to me what's going on in Africa and India. You get here and see issues like child soldiers and AIDS and the horrendous abuse that goes on and you realize that the right to live and survive is the most important right.'

Lucy has come to the PrepCom with the Children's Rights Alliance of England. Lucy credits her mother, who is an activist on a range of social issues, and her friends, the majority of whom are not disabled, with nurturing the self-confidence and independence that she exudes so easily in conversation.

Just to come to the PrepCom, Lucy had to raise 3,000 Pounds Sterling (\$4,500) to cover the expenses of the two personal assistants who travel with her. Neither United Nations nor the British government offered any assistance for Lucy to come to the PrepCom, and she spent the days preceding the conference preparing for special travel arrangements rather than the issues she would discuss at the conference.

Lucy says that her disability was not a criterion to join the delegation. It was a relief for her to come to the PrepCom as an advocate for all children. In spite of this, she also feels that disabled

young people are woefully underrepresented at the PrepCom. Lucy herself is one of only two attending the conference.

As a result, she feels a special responsibility to speak out on issues affecting disabled children. Rights for disabled children are particularly important, she said, because while issues like child soldiers and child poverty affect different parts of the world in different degrees of severity, child disability affects the entire international community.

Lucy said that when young people are excluded and disrespected, they form low expectations of themselves. This is a key problem for disabled young people, who are often mistreated, segregated from society, and abused. Whether within institutions or in the family, disabled children are up to four times more likely to suffer abuse than other children. She believes that all children share the rights to inclusion and respect, and that this should provide the foundation for a discussion of the rights of children with special needs.

'It is important to value people for their humanness, not for their economic productivity and it's important to get the rights of disabled young people recognized on a large scale,' she said, complaining that disabled young people are often viewed as an 'inefficient use of resources.'

Lucy believes the United Nations plays an essential role in protecting children's rights. But she is skeptical about the draft Outcome document's protections for disabled children. She feels that it does not do enough on social segregation, institutional abuse, and resource allocation.

As a whole, she said, the Outcome document is too vague and 'idealistic.' It does not give adequate attention to the implementation of its goals. This, she feels, reflects a lack of conviction – an 'insincerity.' Lucy worries that while there is great emphasis on protecting the rights of children, there is too little emphasis on empowering children.

Five years ago, when Lucy was eleven years old, she founded Young and Powerful, an NGO that focuses on rights for disabled young people and has grown to include over five hundred members and two hundred affiliate organizations.

'I didn't feel there was any place where young people could get together to talk and support each other's rights,' she says.

Young and Powerful has recently lobbied the British government for education legislation that is more sensitive to the needs of disabled children and it has organized protests on a range of issues.

120 Under-18s Meet for Two Days by Nazli Kfoury

Over the weekend, a group of over 120 children from around the world gathered in the basement of UNICEF House to take part in a Youth Participation Conference designed for children under 18.

The Conference, which is organized by the Under-18 Participation Task Force, is open to all children under 18 who are accredited to the UN PrepCom.

The children involved in the program were brought to the PrepCom either through NGOs or as National Delegates.

There was a dramatic increase in the number of Delegates that governments sent since the last PrepCom. At the second PrepCom in February, only six countries sent children under the age of 24. At this PrepCom, 15 countries have sent delegates under the age of 18.

The children spent two days closely studying the Outcome Document and discussing its content.

'The idea was that all of them need to know what the main issues are in the Outcome Document,' one of the adult facilitators, Ravi Karkara said, 'and how they relate to it in terms of how the Outcome Document affects them.'

The Under-18 participants gained an overall understanding of the Outcome Document and eventually separated into five groups. The different topics they focused on were: promoting healthy lives; HIV/AIDS; quality education; child abuse/child sexual exploitation; and partnerships and participation.

'They looked at how the issues relate to themselves and their countries, how they impact them as individuals, and the issues that concern them most and whether or not their issues are really reflected in the document,' said Sara Austin, another adult facilitator. 'They looked to find holes in the document about issues that they want to see governments taking action on and they came up with ideas on ways that they could lobby the governments to have those issues included.'

The participants, having honed their lobbying skills, plan to attend conferences and sessions throughout the week to push for the issues they are most concerned with, in hopes of guaranteeing their issues are seriously considered.

The Young Ugandan Moderator by John Meyers

Joseph Tamale, a 12-year-old boy from Uganda, has been elected by his peers to the current position of moderator. 'I chose to run for the position of moderator because I'm young, responsible and fair,' was what Joseph told On the Record in an interview.

Under-18 Representatives from a wide variety of countries have been stationed in the basement of UNICEF House since Saturday. The children participating in the events taking place during the week are mainly based from this group.

Joseph also told On the Record about his learning experience while being here at the UN this week. 'I'm gaining confidence to discuss matters and also face challenges in life,' he said with great enthusiasm.

Some specific issues that Joseph would like to address while attending the Prep Coms are children's education, poverty and relative discrimination in Uganda.

'Most parents think that to have a boy as your child is a blessing, to have a girl is a curse. So, the boy goes to school and the girl stays at home working,' says Joseph on the topic of relative discrimination.

He also believes that children must be the ones who express their feelings throughout the week. 'The adults used to come up with solutions for the children without consulting them. Now when children think that when they do that, most problems affecting them are not solved,' said Joseph.

Isn't this the real purpose of this week?

Youth Speak our on Hopes by Mark Lent

At the Round Table Meeting yesterday at the Labouisse Hall in the UNICEF House, there was a discussion concerning the protection and promoting of children issues and the building of partnerships between children, teenagers and leaders.

At the meeting, where the child representatives Nicole Bidegain from Uruguay and Francisca Dagan from Africa, spoke out about what concerned them the most. They spoke of their hopes, as did other children afterwards. In a composed, poised manner, Nicole in an interview said that she wanted '...to show the point of view that the Latin American children have, and that the leaders take us seriously.'

When asked what impressed her the most, 16 year-old Nicole Bidegain replied, 'the cultural diversity and way of thinking of the participating children and the positive outlook and the way the truth can be reached, and the will to solve the problems.'

Later, 17 year-old Nellie Bambi from Malawi was interviewed in regard to what her aspirations in the conference were she said that she wants to get her problems through to the leaders; the problems which affect the children and find a solution. She was then asked what she would ask the leaders if given the chance to ask one question,

'Why is it that they always set a number of goals and they sign documents for children, but don't accomplish what they sign?'

The children seemed optimistic when it came to setting their goals for the Special Session on Children and especially impressed with the kind of people that have arrived to take part in the Special Session.

Partnering Together by Alberta Daniels and Shani Hatch

Child participation was the key issue at a Round Table discussion that took place on Monday. The panel included Carol Bellamy, Ambassador Thomass Hammerberg, and two child representatives.

The two child representatives, Nicole Bidegain from the World Alliance of YMCA, and Francisca Dagan from the African Movement for Working Children shared their experiences with meaningful participation in development programs in different regional contexts.

Bidegain, speaking on behalf of the Latin American YMCA, stressed the need for adults to not only listen but to allow children to influence decision making. 'The right to participate is not a favor. It's a right that adults signed onto ten years ago,' Bidegain stated. 'We ask adults to do what they say.'

Dagan's experience endeavouring to improve the lives of working children in Africa has given her valuable insight into how to improve child participation. Her group, the African Movement for Working Children, partners with local health officials to create quality health care that is free and accessible to all child workers.

In Africa, children frequently work at home, in markets and even are able to apprentice with local tradespeople. Referring to the current document being discussed, she asked, 'Please do not erase this sentence: Improve living and working conditions for children.'

Dagan and her colleagues help improve conditions for children living and working on the streets. Her group also counsels parents whose children have left home to work in other villages. Parents are sometimes unaware of the conditions their children face when they are separated from the family. Because of the difficult economic conditions faced by families in developing countries, children are sometimes required to work both in and outside of the home to help provide for their needs.

Strengthening the rights of children to remain at home with their families is very important. This is one of twelve rights that the African Movement for Working Children promotes through their efforts. They hope to stop child exploitation and improve the lives of these children.

Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, pointed out that the most important aspect of these conferences is not what happens here but what happens after when governments actually use this document to make laws.

This session ended with Thomas Hammerberg, Special Advisor to the Swedish Government on Humanitarian Issues, who stressed repeatedly article 12 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child which states, 'The views of the child should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.'

It is important to balance the degree of participation with the child's age and understanding of the issues. He encouraged the older generation to recognize the voices of young people as one of the most crucial aspects of ensuring effective child participation.