

# PEACE

24/7

Empowering Youth to Be Ministers of Peace and Justice

"Human rights are inscribed in the hearts of people; they were there long before lawmakers drafted their first proclamation."

Mary Robinson, United Nations high commissioner for human rights

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead, anthropologist

"A century that began with children having virtually no rights is ending with children having the most powerful legal instrument that not only recognizes but protects their human rights."

Carol Bellamy, UNICEF executive director

## You Have Rights!

## Rights of the Child



photo by Adam Roberson, used by permission

"We cannot waste our precious children. Not another one, not another day."

—Nelson Mandela and Graça Machel

# Become Aware

Have you ever felt hungry or unappreciated? Have you ever been concerned for your safety or fearful of war? Do you receive opportunities for education? Do you receive the same rights in your church and school and family whether you're male or female, of a different culture, or disabled?

While many think that poverty, child labor, abuse, war, and health care, only happen in undeveloped countries, these concerns are universal.

Until the late 1980s, there was very little concern about the rights of children and youth. Appalling conditions related to hunger, abuse, poverty, child labor, lack of education, and more was a global disregard. Children in most parts of the world were little more than property, and unvalued property at that.

Children's rights were finally and most fully articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and reinforced in 2002 at the Special Summit on the Rights

of the Child. Created over a period of ten years from representatives of many societies, religions, and cultures, the document became the most universally adopted human rights treaty in history.

A child is defined as any person up to age eighteen. Rights are defined as what every child is entitled to for survival and development. This includes the basics (food, water, housing) but extends to education, health care, a name, a nationality, protection from war and abuse and exploitation. In addition, rights include having opinions heard, the right to play, and more.

## How Bad Is It?

It's difficult to think of children being abused, especially in the twenty-first century. Yet, it's true. And it probably involves some of your peers and perhaps even you. A few facts about the world's children is in the chart at the right.

## What You Can Do

As in other *PEACE 24/7* issues, we emphasize that you can become aware, acknowledge responsibility, take action, and become an advocate. Do this on behalf of those younger than you, or your peers, or even for yourself. Kids' rights are people's rights, and they are ensurable under the belief that all are God's children and equal in the sight of God.

## State of the World's Children

- In 2000, over fifty million babies were not registered, given a name and a nationality, forty-one percent of births worldwide. Children not registered at birth are denied their identity—imperative for participation in society.
- Nearly 120 million primary-school-age children are not in school, 53 percent of them girls.
- Millions of children under five die each year from diseases easily preventable by vaccines.
- Due mostly to poverty, 150 million children are underweight, increasing their risk of death and mental and physical development.
- Since 1990, two million children have been killed and six million have been seriously injured in wars.
- Over 180 million children aged 5–17 are believed to be engaged in the worst forms of child labor—one child in every eight.
- Every year, 1.2 million children are trafficked.
- Fourteen million children currently under fifteen years old have lost one or both parents to AIDS.  
(information from [www.unicef.org/sowc03/maps](http://www.unicef.org/sowc03/maps))

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

# Acknowledge Responsibility

- The scripture references about children show a new way of relating, empowering, and caring. Read the scriptures and discuss how the concepts expressed relate to those in the world, in schools, in church, and in families.
- Discuss or journal what these scriptures mean to you in terms of children's rights, and how God views children. What is our responsibility to children? How have children played a significant role in history? What qualities do children have that sets them before us as examples?
- What model has Jesus set for how to grow and be nurtured? What happens if we hurt a child in any way? Explain your experiences with the "giftedness and energy of children and youth."

## Genesis 33:14 NRSV

I will lead on slowly, according to the pace . . . of the children.

## Matthew 18:4 NRSV

Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

## 1 Corinthians 1:4–8 adapted

I always thank God for you. I thank God because of the grace that God gave you because you belong to Christ Jesus. You have been blessed in every way because of Jesus. Our testimony has been proven true in you. There is no gift of the Holy Spirit that you don't have. You are full of hope, and God will keep you strong until the end.

## Matthew 18:14 adapted

We want every child to grow in body, mind, and spirit, supported by caring communities. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.

## Doctrine and Covenants 161:4a

Do not neglect the smallest among you, for even the least of these are treasures in God's sight. Receive the giftedness and energy of children and youth, listening to understand their questions and their wisdom. Respond to their need to be loved and nurtured as they grow.

**1 LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND**  
 Because every girl and boy is born free and equal in dignity and rights, all forms of discrimination and exclusion against children must end.

**2 PUT CHILDREN FIRST**  
 Governments must meet their obligations to children and young people. At the same time, everyone—including individuals, non-governmental organizations, religious groups, the private sector, and children and adolescents themselves—must recognize their responsibility to ensure that child rights are respected

**3 CARE FOR EVERY CHILD**  
 All children must enjoy the highest attainable standard of health, especially through immunization, good nutrition and diet, clean water and adequate sanitation, proper housing, and a safe and healthy environment.

**4 FIGHT HIV/AIDS**  
 Children and adolescents and their families must be protected from the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS.

**5 STOP HARMING AND EXPLOITING CHILDREN**  
 The violence and abuse that children suffer must be stopped now. The sexual and economic exploitation of children must also end.

**6 LISTEN TO CHILDREN**  
 Everyone must respect the right of children and young people to express themselves and to participate in decisions that affect them, consistent with their evolving capabilities. We must listen and act.

**7 EDUCATE EVERY CHILD**  
 All girls and boys must receive a compulsory, free primary education of good quality.

**8 PROTECT CHILDREN FROM WAR**  
 Children must be protected from the horrors of armed conflict.

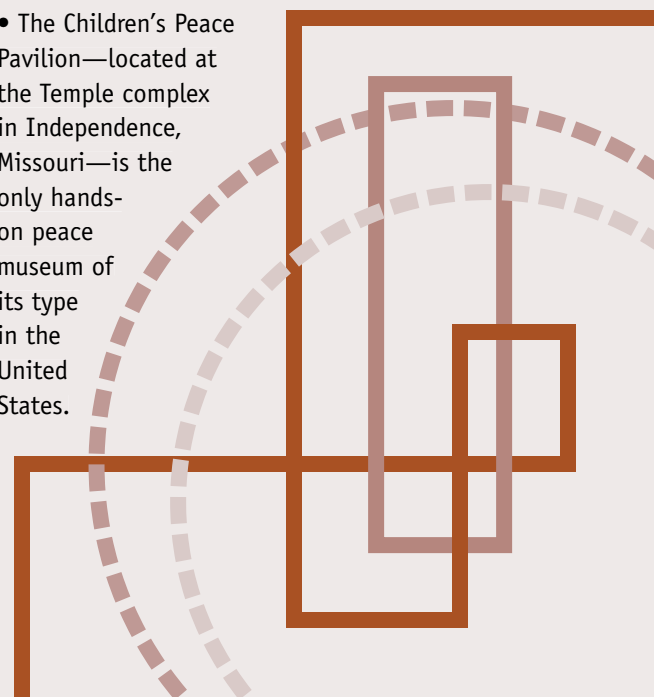
**9 PROTECT THE EARTH FOR CHILDREN**  
 There must be urgent steps by every one of us—including governments, civil society, and the private sector—to assure the well-being and security of future generations by safeguarding the environment at global, national, and local levels

**10 FIGHT POVERTY: INVEST IN CHILDREN**  
 Because children suffer the most from poverty, the fight against it must begin with them. This includes investing in social services that benefit the poorest children and their families, such as basic health care and primary education. At the same time, the well-being of children must be a priority objective of debt-relief programs, development assistance, and government spending.

## Acquire More Understanding

### Community of Christ Affirms Children and Youth

- Congregations around the world provide ministry programs for children, youth, and their families.
- The first youth-only camp in the church was held seventy-five years ago in 1928 at Camp Nauvoo, Illinois.
- A youth worker registration program, Protecting Our Children, was initiated in 1995 to ensure that all youth workers were safe to work with children and youth through a very careful screening process. Currently, there are 12,000 persons registered as safe youth workers. For more information or to become a registered youth worker, contact Diane Martin at [dmartin@CofChrist.org](mailto:dmartin@CofChrist.org).
- Children and youth can serve as delegates to World Conference at the age of eight and above.
- The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths has recently been placed on the Community of Christ calendar. Children's Sabbath encourages congregations to support the needs of children in their communities through advocacy, worship, and education. Marian Wright Edelman, director of the Children's Defense Fund and Children's Sabbath, received an International Peace Award from the Community of Christ in 1995 for her tremendous work on behalf of kids.
- Forefront Children and Youth Ministries creates resources for Christian education, camps, reunions, leadership training, along with other related ministries.
- The Children's Peace Pavilion—located at the Temple complex in Independence, Missouri—is the only hands-on peace museum of its type in the United States.



# Take Action

- Interpret the Rights of the Child for your local situation, How do the Rights relate to youth your age in your community, school, neighborhood, or church. Summarize and prioritize them. What Right is the most often abused? Who does it affect? What steps can be taken to give your voice to it, make changes about it?

- Provide an after-school reading program, help in a soup kitchen, build a neighborhood playground, collect shoes or gloves for homeless children, or whatever is necessary. Report on your project to the congregation and invite their involvement.

- Look up one or more Web sites listed to the right and create a world map of where rights are most often abused. Discuss: Where in the world is the greatest need?

- Read “A World Fit for Us,” the presentation to the United Nations by the child delegates at [www.unicef.org/specialsession/documentation/childrens-statement.htm](http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/documentation/childrens-statement.htm). Discuss how you feel about the statement. Do you agree with it? Write a similar statement in your group with each person choosing a particular focus topic on which to write one paragraph. Share your statement at school, in the congregation, or on a Web site.

- Volunteer in a place where children’s lives may be impacted: a hospital, day care center, latch-key or tutoring program, or other.

- Learn more about global organizations helping to end child poverty and child labor, such as RUGMARK that offers educational opportunities for rug-stitchers in India, Nepal, and Pakistan. The RUGMARK label is used to ensure that no illegal child labor was employed in the manufacture of a carpet or rug. The FoulBall Campaign was launched by the International Labor Rights Fund to end the exploitation of child labor in the soccer ball industry and to move children from soccer ball stitching to schools in Sialkot, Pakistan, where 70 percent of the world’s soccer balls are made. Other organizations involve children in making the world a better place such as Jane Goodall’s Roots and Shoots program for environmental support. What organizations exist in your community or area of influence to make a difference for young people?

## Become an Advocate

- A new focus from the United Nations is on child participation—the right for all children to have their opinions taken into account when decisions are made that affect them. *The State of the World’s Children 2003* showcases examples of meaningful child participation from every region of the world. This was evident in the 2002 Special Summit on the Rights of the Child where several hundred children and youth attended and voiced their concerns. To hear more of what they had to say, link to [www.unicef.org/young](http://www.unicef.org/young). How can you take action and let your voice be heard? How can you influence decisions being made that affect you?

- Sign up with a local or international children’s rights advocacy group or spend time improving the situation of children and families in your neighborhood.

### Web sites for information and action

[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

[www.peaceoneday.org](http://www.peaceoneday.org)

[www.gmfcc.org](http://www.gmfcc.org)

Global Movement for Children

[www.cdfactioncouncil.org](http://www.cdfactioncouncil.org)

Children’s Defense Fund Action Council

[www.crin.org](http://www.crin.org)

Child Rights Information Network

[www.laborrights.org/projects/childlab](http://www.laborrights.org/projects/childlab)

[childlab](http://www.laborrights.org/projects/childlab)

International Labor Organization



**Books for All Ages**  
*A Life like Mine; How Children Live around the World*, DK Publishing with UNICEF (2002). ISBN 0-7894-8859-0.

Books available from [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org):  
*Adolescence: A Time That Matters*. Adolescents have rights to information and skills; access to services, such as education, health, recreation, and justice; a safe and supportive environment; and opportunities to participate and to have their voices heard.



*Out of War: True Stories from the Front Lines of the Children’s Movement for Peace in Colombia*. An award-winning author collected the stories of nine young Colombians who work for peace in the face of unrelenting violence.



*For Every Child*, with a foreword by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, covers the most important children’s rights, retold and illustrated by some of the world’s most acclaimed artists.

