

The Children's Voice

on Child Rights

Welcome!

Welcome to the first edition of the youth newsletter supported by the Campaign for U.S. Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This monthly newsletter is written by youth and for youth to engage our youngest minds around the goal of U.S. ratification of the CRC. The newsletter aims to mobilize, raise awareness and motivate young people to become civically engaged in children's rights at both a community and national level of action. We hope you enjoy the first edition and we welcome feedback and contributions from youth around the country.

Get Involved and Make a Difference in YOUR COMMUNITY:

What children and youth are doing to support U.S. Ratification of the CRC

- Watch the video of how San Mateo County, California youth helped to pass a **Children's Bill of Rights**: <http://vimeo.com/9221295>
- Watch how youth in New York have raised awareness about child rights through the **Global Kids Annual Youth Conference: "Got to have my Rights"** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9e2Oz8NjMQ8>
- On March 10th, students from **Human Rights Watch Student Task Force** gave oral testimony in support of the CRC helping to pass a city resolution in LA. (*Read students speeches in newsletter*)
- Youth are coming together to explore children's rights by participating in the **Academy for the Rights of the Child** at Argosy University, Tampa Bay, Florida. To join in contact: jestevez@communitytampabay.org
- City of Santa Clarita, CA: At the April 27, 2010, City Council meeting, the Council heard public participation from representatives of **The Student Task Force from Canyon Country High School**, who requested that the Council consider passing a resolution in support of The Convention on the Rights of the Child
- **Youth in Norway take on the US** Youth in Norway through Save the Children have creatively advocated for the US to Ratify the CRC. Sign their petition and view their YouTube videos on child rights at: www.goratify.com



TAKE ACTION NOW:

1. Join the Campaign: www.childrightscampaign.org
2. Join the Campaign's Facebook Fan Page: <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/pages/Child-Rights-Campaign/106607756035085>
3. Tweet with us at: @RatifytheCRC
4. Sign the Global Kids Petition at: <http://www.petitiononline.com/crc2010/petition.html>
5. Send a letter to President Obama asking him to send the CRC to the Senate: www.whitehouse.gov
6. Send a letter to your senator asking for their support to ratify the CRC: www.senate.gov
7. Sign up to participate in the Campaign's Monthly Telephone/Skype Conference calls on Child Rights: Kids Unite Call-Ins. youth@childrightscampaign.org
8. Submit **YOUR** story on Child Rights to youth@childrightscampaign.org
9. Share your activities and events to promote U.S. ratification of the CRC to the Campaign at: youth@childrightscampaign.org

What Youth are saying about Child Rights...



What the CRC means for my Community

Miriam Shestack and Jamie Bando, age 16, Juniors at Crossroads High School, Santa Monica, CA

It was three years ago, September of freshman year, when we were first introduced to the Student Task Force. A friend recommended SOUL (Students Organized for Unity and Liberation) club, and we came with little more than our community service requirements in mind. It didn't take long to see, though, that we had committed to something that went far beyond our school. The education that makes up such a large part of the Student Task Force, hit us hard. Through learning about the crisis in Darfur, the plight of child soldiers across the globe, and the injustice in the juvenile justice system right here in California, we quickly came to realize just how lucky our lives here on the west side of Los Angeles really are. The Student Task Force's involvement in children's rights issues led to our most recent project, working with the campaign for United States ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, or the CRC.

The CRC is the fastest ratified human rights treaty ever, and the first to cover a full range of rights for people under the age of eighteen. United States laws are largely consistent with the CRC.

But the fact is, although we have it remarkably good here in America, particularly those of us living comfortably on the west side of LA, we have a responsibility to the rest of the world.

The main obstacle to US ratification of the CRC is not so much opposition to the treaty, but a lack of awareness. When we visited the office of Senator Barbara Boxer in November to discuss the CRC, we found, much to our surprise, that the field representative we spoke with had never heard of the CRC. Nonetheless, we were well received and he was impressed by our commitment to human rights at such a young age.

The potential of youth activism or children's rights became especially clear when a delegation of Student Task Force members visited LA city council to discuss the adoption the CRC. City Council voted unanimously to adopt the CRC. After our presentation City council president Eric Garcetti, along with council members Rosendahl and Cardenas spoke to us about the significance of the CRC in Los Angeles. By adopting the CRC the city of Los Angeles declared its commitment to stopping the children's rights abuses that still happen here. Progress will come slowly, but by making our commitment to children's rights official, we as a city set a standard that says that we can no longer ignore those still suffering so close to home. Nothing could make us happier than knowing that in our city, and hopefully in our country too one day, children have a voice.

Continued human rights advocacy, more than anything else, requires an acceptance of delayed gratification. Even so, we know now that furthering human rights will remain a goal in our lives for a very long time. The Student Task Force operates under the slogan of "taking responsibility for the future". It achieves this in two ways. Student Task Force takes responsibility for the world of tomorrow not only by speaking for children's rights today, but by leaving students with a will to speak in defense of human rights well into the future.



**The Campaign for U.S. Ratification of the
Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The Significance of U.S. Ratification of the CRC

What Children's Rights Mean to Me

Jacqueline Aldaco, age 17, senior at Carson High School, Carson, CA

Since its inception, the United States has well established its role as a socio-cultural pioneer. Individuals have emigrated from their respective countries in the hopes of finding opportunities that would allow for a better life. Our founding fathers sought to create a nation that would uphold essential human rights, such as democracy, equality, safety, and other notions that were ridiculed at the time. For over 200 years, people have packed their few belongings and headed to the United States in search of political asylum, economic independence, religious freedom, etc., hoping their children would lead better lives.

America has continuously served as an advocate for human rights throughout the world, a powerful nation where people chase after their dreams and aspirations. The United States, a nation that encapsulates endless opportunities, the one that makes me proud to be a fortunate citizen... a country that has long stood against oppression and injustices... cannot ratify a human rights treaty serving to protect children. My body feels a sudden rush of anger when I think about all the helpless children that are being forced into sexual slavery at this very moment. I cannot help feeling terror at the idea of my little brother being defenseless and unprotected against essential human rights.

Despite the many rights and advantages that Americans can boast, there are still countless improvements that have yet to be made. Amongst those pivotal matters lie the universal rights of children. Every night, thousands of children go to bed feeling hungry and neglected. As we eagerly await the blessing of another day, a defenseless child somewhere in a corner of our world continues to face never-ending exploitation that has stolen his/ her childhood. Without giving the situation much thought, most if not all of us, would instinctively react in a defensive way. Why then is it so hard to acknowledge a treaty that would ensure the welfare of our children?

If we cannot protect the more vulnerable members of our society, what is the purpose of establishing intricate government with sophisticated laws if our children are being deprived of basic necessities? When we think of this exploitation, our minds tend to lead us across great distances, to foreign lands, yet to our surprise much of this exploitation occurs in our community.

If we adopt a passive attitude towards the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we become accomplices to those who deprive children of their most basic rights. For these reasons, it is essential that we as citizens take an active role in ensuring that the United States ratifies the CRC. It is needless to say that the U.S ratification would have a beneficial impact in our communities; likewise, the lives of children across nations would improve drastically. Countries around the globe use the United States' social systems as models that can aid in further development and improvement for the lives of their citizens.

As a leader and advocate for human rights, the U.S ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child would serve, to further emphasize and uphold these standards throughout the world. This would naturally create a domino effect that would serve as a solid foundation, providing the fundamental necessities of a child regardless of his or her color, race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, or location. The U.S adoption of the CRC would provide a safe and nurturing environment for children throughout the globe. As citizens of this planet, it is our responsibility to ensure the rights and welfare of future generations. Clearly the universal adoption of the CRC is the first and foremost step. How else would we ensure the interests of future generations, if we fail to recognize the significance of protecting our legacy?



The Campaign for U.S. Ratification of the
Convention on the Rights of the Child

Students Speak before the LA City Council

Los Angeles City Council Convention on the Rights of the Child Adoption Talking Points

Introduction (Pilar Garcia-Brown) 1 minute 36 seconds: Good morning, distinguished Council members. My name is Pilar Garcia-Brown, and I am a member of the Human Rights Watch Student Task Force at Palisades Charter High School. I am honored to be a member of this delegation and to speak with you today.

The Student Task Force, comprised of students from nine public and private high schools in Los Angeles, works to raise awareness about human rights issues, and to create advocacy activities in our schools and communities. As youth ourselves, we focus on the rights of our peers across the world and at home. For the past year we have studied the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and attempted to enlighten our fellow classmates, our communities, and even politicians on the importance of U.S. ratification of this crucial treaty. From giving classroom presentations to creating simulations of refugee camps, the Student Task Force shares the same goal: to promote the well-being of children all over the world.

From meeting with formerly incarcerated youth to hearing from a former child soldier, my fellow students and I have seen the faces of human rights violations. If you were to see these individuals and myself in the same room, you would not be able to tell us apart. But these children have experienced a vastly different childhood. We have become aware of the extent of injustice that often goes unnoticed and without remedy, and realized the need for immediate action. We have become inspired to speak on behalf of these individuals for the purpose of giving those that are forcefully silenced a strong and determined voice. That is why we are here today to urge the L.A. City Council's to adopt the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Los Angeles City Council Convention on the Rights of the Child Adoption Talking Points

CRC Background (Miriam Shestack) 1 minute 35 seconds: Thank you Pilar. My name is Miriam Shestack and I am a member of the Student Task Force at Crossroads School. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is an international human rights treaty created to promote and protect the well-being of *all* children. It sets forth basic standards including access to clean water, the right to an education, and protection from abuse. Our commitment to children's rights is both global and local. As Los Angeles children with a full-range of human rights, we find it imperative to speak on the behalf of all youth, not just the lucky ones.

193 countries have ratified the CRC, making it the fastest and most widely ratified human rights treaty ever. We are ashamed to report that the United States and Somalia are the only two UN member states who have not ratified the CRC. And even Somalia has recently declared intent to ratify in the near future. I am embarrassed by my country's failure to acknowledge the rights of its youngest and most vulnerable citizens. Our lack of action is especially inexcusable because the CRC can be implemented into our policies and programs right now. Provisions contained in the CRC are largely consistent with U.S. and California law. With adoption of the CRC, LA city departments, agencies, and committees can improve their ability to coordinate programs and policies to best protect our children. By supporting the CRC, the city of Los Angeles would become one of the first urban cities in the US to adopt this important treaty, thus signifying a great commitment to its children.

Los Angeles City Council Convention on the Rights of the Child Adoption Talking Points

Why It's Important (Robin Wong) 1 minute 27 seconds: Thank you Miriam, my name is Robin Wong and I am a member of the Student Task Force at New Roads School. As a children's rights activist for my entire high school career, I've learned about the wide range of issues children face in the United States and the international community. Upon learning about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, I was excited to see that this international treaty is the first to cover the full range of children's rights. That's one of the reasons we feel so strongly about supporting the CRC. Also, we believe LA adoption is so important because it will show that Los Angeles is a leader in protecting children's rights. By not ratifying the CRC, the US looks like it is failing to recognize and address the plight of children everywhere. We have the opportunity in Los Angeles to take a stand for *our* children and ensure that no child's story is left unheard. Without ratifying the Convention, the US also cannot be a part of the Committee on the CRC and therefore cannot contribute to an international discussion of children's rights. By taking a stand and adopting the CRC in LA, we are able to maintain a strong local discussion of children's rights. The CRC thus gives us the opportunity to show our solidarity with the international community and protect our children in the way that we, as Americans, Californians and Angelinos see most befitting.

Los Angeles City Council Convention on the Rights of the Child Adoption Talking Points

Closing Remarks (Hani Tajsar) 1 minute 12 seconds: Thank you Robin. My name is Hani Tajsar and I am a member of the Student Task Force at Palisades Charter High School. On behalf of members at all nine STF schools, I would like to thank you for welcoming us today. We hope you will join our campaign to protect children's rights by voting yes on the resolution Councilmember Garcetti submitted for the Council's approval. By enacting this resolution, Los Angeles would demonstrate its commitment to leading the country in the protection and promotion of children's rights. With adoption of the CRC, Los Angeles will be able to make progress in areas of concern to families and children all across the city. It is our responsibility to stand up for human rights and show the rest of our nation that we will begin this venture in our own community. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, "human rights begin in small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world." Thank you again.

Youth Summary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is one of the most important human rights treaties that exist today. Yet two nations have not ratified it: the United States and Somalia. The Convention is not clearly understood nor accessible to the individuals it was designed to protect: young people. Below is a translation of this document in common English for children and youth, but first, let's define some important terms.

Definitions

Children's Rights: Human rights that belong to children and youth by nature of their status as minors. These rights help to ensure children grow up in a safe and healthy environment that fosters their development.

Convention: An agreement (treaty) between countries to follow the same international standards.

Human Rights: Rights and freedoms that belong to each individual. Human rights affirm the inherent dignity of every person. Examples include freedom from being discriminated against and the right to an adequate standard of living.

Ratification: The act of formally approving a treaty or constitution. In the U.S., ratification of the CRC requires that two-thirds (67/100) of the Senate vote in favor of the treaty.

United Nations: An international organization that is committed to the preservation and upholding of human rights. The U.S. has been a member of the UN since its establishment in 1945.

There are 54 Articles within the Convention, below are the first 10 Articles

The Convention Article 1 (Who is a child?): The Convention applies to you if you are under 18 years of age unless your country's law specifies that you are an adult at a younger age.

Article 2 (Freedom from discrimination): All children are equal regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, culture, religion, family status, or disabilities.

Article 3 (Your best interests): Adults' decisions affect us; therefore, when making decisions, they should consider the impact of their decision on us and whether or not it is in our best interest.

Article 4 (Role of government): Governments are responsible for ensuring your rights are upheld. This includes making changes to laws, programs, and policies.

Article 5 (Family respect): Your parents, family members, and guardians are an essential part of your life. They love and care for us as well as provide us with direction and guidance. Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of our families.

Article 6 (Your life is special): You have the right to life. Governments are responsible for ensuring your survival and development.

Article 7 (Who am I?): Upon your birth, you have the right to have an identity. This includes having your own name and nationality, and, when possible, to know and be cared for by your parents.

Article 8 (Protecting your identity): Governments are responsible for registering your birth and ensuring the preservation of your identity.

Article 9 (A loving home): You have the right to live with your parents unless this is not in your best interest. In court proceedings and hearings regarding the separation of you from your parents, you have the right to express your opinion on this matter. Even if you don't live with your parents, you have the right to remain in contact with them except if this would cause you harm.

Article 10 (Keeping families together): Sometimes parents and children do not live in the same country. However, you have a right to remain in contact with them. If you need to enter or leave a country in order to be reunited with your family, governments should help you in doing so.