

Children's Rights and the Environment

Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur



WHAT IS THE UNITED NATIONS?

The United Nations –UN– is made up of 193 countries from across the world. Its role is to support these countries to keep their human rights promises.



WHO IS THE SPECIAL RAPPOREUR?

Special Rapporteurs – SRs – are experts who advise governments and others on human rights. The SR on Human Rights and the Environment is John H. Knox.



WHAT ARE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS?

Children's rights are the promises that the world's governments have made to children. Children have a special set of rights in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – UNCRC.



WHY IS THE SR WRITING ABOUT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS & THE ENVIRONMENT?

Children are more at risk from environmental problems than adults but their views and interests are often left out of decisions.



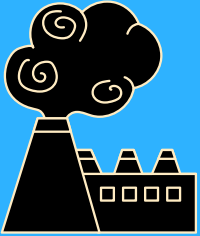
WHO IS THIS REPORT FOR?

The SR thought it was important to provide people with advice on this topic.

He wants it to be used by governments, children, parents, businesses and others.

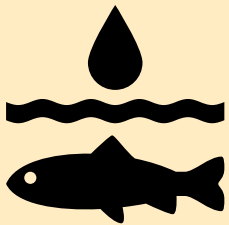
WHAT EFFECTS DO ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS HAVE ON CHILDREN?

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES:



AIR POLLUTION

Children breathe more quickly, are more likely to get chest infections and find it harder to recover.



WATER POLLUTION

At least 1 in every 4 people around the world drinks water that is unsafe.

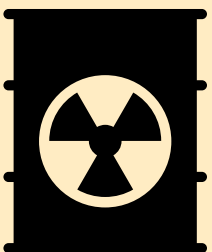
This can cause blindness and other diseases.



CLIMATE CHANGE

When more and heavier floods happen children may have to leave their homes.

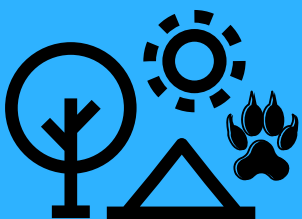
They might be split up from their families and this puts them in danger.



CHEMICALS AND WASTE

Children in some countries recycle old mobile phones without having the proper safety equipment.

This can expose them to harmful chemicals.



ECOSYSTEMS OUT OF BALANCE

A good natural environment exposes children to different things.

Children need to be exposed to lots of different germs to be healthy (e.g. to avoid allergies).

WHICH CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ARE AFFECTED?

HERE ARE THE MAIN ONES:



RIGHT TO LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT

Every child has the right to life and development - Article 6, UNCRC.

1.5 million deaths of children under the age of 5 could be stopped by reducing environmental health risks.



RIGHT TO HEALTH

Every child has the right to good quality health care and a clean environment - Article 24, UNCRC.

Not being able to wash their hands with clean water can increase children's chances of getting diseases such as stomach bugs.



RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING

All children have the right to a decent standard of living, including food, housing, water - Article 27, UNCRC.

When there is not enough food and clean water children can become hungry and sick.



RIGHT TO PLAY AND RECREATION

All children have the right to relax and play, and to join a wide range of activities - Article 31, UNCRC.

Many children are in danger when they play, because of polluted water and open dumps.

WHAT ARE GOVERNMENTS REQUIRED TO DO?



EDUCATION

Children should be able to learn by being outside in nature, taking part in projects about the issues affecting the environment locally and across the world.

Children should learn to respect the natural environment – Article 29, UNCRC.



INFORMATION

Information on the environment should be made available to children in ways that they can understand.

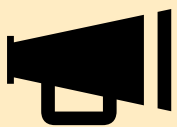
Children have a right to seek and receive information – Article 13, UNCRC.



RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S VIEWS

Governments should speak to children and take their experiences and ideas into account when making decisions on the environment.

Governments must seek the views of children on matters affecting them and take them seriously – Article 12, UNCRC.



COMPLAINTS AND REMEDIES

Complaints should be dealt with quickly and fairly and children should be able to get a response and solution (e.g. an order to stop someone who is causing environmental harm).

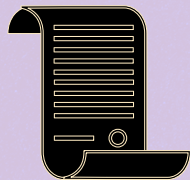


TREAT ALL CHILDREN EQUALLY

Governments should make sure that children enjoy their rights equally. Some children face extra challenges (e.g., girls from a lack of clean water and some children with disabilities at times of natural disaster).

Children's rights apply to all children whatever their sex, race, religion or abilities – Article 2, UNCRC.

WHAT OTHER THINGS SHOULD GOVERNMENTS AND OTHERS DO?



MAKE LAWS

The best interests of children should be one of the most important considerations when governments are making laws that may affect the environment.

Environmental protection agencies should make sure that everyone is obeying the rules that protect children.



WORK TOGETHER

Governments should work with each other to make sure that children's rights are protected across the world.

Sometimes poisonous waste from one country is dumped in another country and children are harmed as a result.



CHECK ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Governments should take into account research that shows how the environment is affecting children. They should also ask children for their opinions on their plans.



ACT RESPONSIBLY

Businesses should check the impact of their activities. They should follow the UN's advice to businesses on protecting children's rights.

When companies take coal out of the earth or use water from rivers, this can affect local children's lives.



THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE

Decisions about environmental problems should consider the rights of children who are constantly arriving on this planet.

Some countries have laws that say the government and others must protect the environment for future children.

WHAT CAN CHILDREN DO?

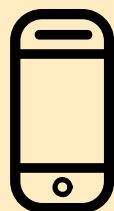
HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FROM OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE



GET INFORMED

You could...

Get books on the environment, check the internet.



SPREAD THE WORD

You could...

Speak about it at your school, share on social media.



TAKE THE LEAD

You could...

Reduce, reuse, recycle; walk or cycle instead of using a car.



CAMPAIGN

You could...

Join an environmental group in your school or community or raise issues in a youth parliament.

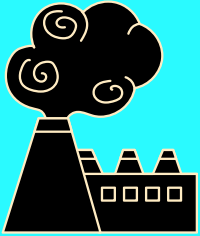


MAKE A COMPLAINT

You could...

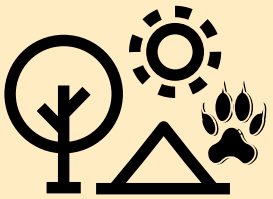
Contact your local authority or speak to a responsible adult about taking legal action.

SOME WORDS EXPLAINED



POLLUTION

When something harmful is brought into the environment.



ECOSYSTEM

This includes all living things like plants and animals in a certain area. All of these rely on each other as well as non-living things like air and water.



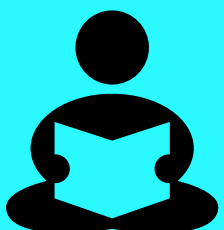
CLIMATE CHANGE

Humans have warmed up the climate by burning fossil fuels which put too many gases that trap heat into the sky.



HUMAN RIGHTS

These are the rights all humans have to make sure that everyone is treated equally and with respect. The UN has helped countries to make lots of human rights agreements.



UNCRC

The UNCRC - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - is a list of rights that all children have. These are strong promises made by governments to make sure that children lead a good life.



This child-friendly version of the Special Rapporteur's report was written and designed by Andy, Catriona, Ellen, Fiona, Gabriel, Hannah, Katie, Megan, Noyal, Orlaith, Pearce, Pearse, Roma and Shivani (students at Rathmore Grammar School, Belfast, Northern Ireland).

They worked with Professor Laura Lundy, Dr Michelle Templeton and Jen Banks from the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Graphic Designer Georgia (Bello Designs).

Advice was provided by John H. Knox – the Special rapporteur on human rights and the environment, and his team, and Jonas Schubert from Terres des Hommes.

We are grateful for the support of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).



Terre des Hommes
International Federation



This report is adapted from the Special Rapporteur's report on Children's Rights and the Environment (A/HRC/37/58).

For more information see www.ohchr.org