

Harnessing the Power of Children and Youth and Their Advocates

On behalf of children and youth worldwide and the International NGO **Ariel Foundation International** (AFI) with ECOSOC Status. This statement on COVID-19 and Multilateralism is written by AFI Children and Youth Ambassadors.

The United Nations Partnership Sustainable Development Goal (SDG #17) encourages different stakeholders in international, national and local communities to work together through partnerships. This SDG and its' broader goal to unite various communities during this time of crisis. One of the key aspects of collaboration that has gone unnoticed in recent years is harnessing the power of children and youth voices and youth advocates.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a lot of systemic challenges to the forefront of global discussions. The inequities, for long time were brushed under the rug, are now being addressed. While we have the political and economic capital to address these issues, it is time that we let the young generation lead our path to recovery. While many countries are now relying on their senior level leaders for the recovery from the pandemic, it is those who are most impacted, children and youth need to be partners in spearheading this transformation.

We, children and youth would urge both governmental or non-governmental organization to find ways of having the input of children and youth, including holding focus group sessions, and community service projects. The active participation of children and youth allows their ideas, concerns and solutions to be included to help bridge the gap, and will help build back better after the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the health level, we should be looking for multiple ways of prevention to give the world a wider variety of choice rather than just vaccines. As many children and youth will not be vaccinated. Some cultures, beliefs, lifestyles and geographic areas may lead people away from taking the vaccine. Also, there are many people who simply can't take the vaccine due to medical reasons like allergies and other pre-existing conditions.

The rhetoric surrounding those who cannot take the vaccine has become polemic. Yet recognising the nuances of each person's situation and choices are extremely important. Thus, leading governmental health agencies should make it clear that when the vaccine is a choice for the many, there are some who may chose not to be vaccinated.

We believe that an international treaty for pandemic preparedness is a needed reform worldwide. The pandemic did not discriminate against nationality and regardless of one's background everyone was hit the same way. Recognizing collective humanity and taking substantive action to be prepare should another disaster like COVID strike necessitates the participation and voices of children and youth worldwide.

Ariel Foundation International Changemakers Children's Summits (www.arielfoundation.org)

1. **AFI Young Changemakers on the 46th Human Rights Council at the United Nations Publication.**
https://issuu.com/arielfoundation/docs/afi_young_changemakers_at_the_46th_human_rights_co
2. **Coronavirus & Africa: A Youth Perspective**
https://issuu.com/home/published/coronavirus_and_africa_final
3. **Young Ambassadors views on Coronavirus**
https://issuu.com/home/published/afi_young_changemakers_report_on_coronavirus_7_may