

A Joint Input
to the
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

For inclusion in the development of the
Human Rights 75 Youth Declaration

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By



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and



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1 INTRODUCTION

This joint submission is compiled by Edmund Rice International and Christian Brothers College, St John's (CBC St John's). Edmund Rice International (ERI), is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) granted ECOSOC status at the UN in 2012 and committed to working for children and young people who are marginalised because of poverty, lack of access to education, legal status, environmental degradation, or involvement in armed conflict.

ERI works at the international level to promote and protect the rights of children and young people, particularly regarding education. We work in partnership with other faith-based groups in the promotion of peace and justice. Our work involves engagement with the change-makers at the international level to bring issues and situations to the attention of the international community at the United Nations.

CBC St John's is an independent Catholic School for children aged 2 to Matric, in the Edmund Rice Tradition. As a Christian Brothers College, we are proud of our rich tradition and combine this with a contemporary academic vision of excellence, within a holistic educational environment. Our Senior School students from the advocacy group contributed to the development of this submission and the recommendations contained therein.

1 1 What are the challenges the world is facing now, how they will affect the future of human rights, and what future do you want for human rights?

Gender-based violence (GBV) poses as serious risk to the future of human rights. In Africa, girls experience gender-specific forms of discrimination which limit their ability to fully realise their human rights. GBV is directly linked to gender inequality and South Africa has reported some of the highest statistics of GBV murder across the world.¹ Socio-cultural practices, such as child marriage, sexual harassment, *ukuthwala* and female genital mutilation (FGM) further enforce gender inequalities.² A future which is based on human rights is one where children can grow up and feel safe enough to explore their opportunities and truly believe that they can do anything because of the freedom they have around them. This is a future where women and children feel safe, and all people feel united.

Within the South African context, the projections from climate change activity range from not only an increase in average global temperature but also an increase in natural disasters such as floods and drought.³ The result is an aggravation of poor socio-economic conditions and increased social vulnerability.⁴ It is critical to draw attention to the impact of climate change on the most vulnerable members of society, children, who bear the least responsibility for the development of the climate crisis but who are ultimately the most at risk.⁵ A future for human rights would involve global cooperation to address issues like inequality, oppression, and environmental challenges. It would ensure equal rights and opportunities for everyone, regardless of their background, while upholding individual freedoms and fostering a more inclusive and just society.

¹ MC Moreroa & MB Rapanyane "A Growing Outcry of Gender-based Violence and Gender Inequality in South Africa: An Afrocentric Perspective" (2021) 10 *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development* 13.

² Djouguela *The right to education for the girl-child and problems facing adolescent girls in the pursuit of their right to education* 4 and MC Moreroa & MB Rapanyane "A Growing Outcry of Gender-based Violence and Gender Inequality in South Africa: An Afrocentric Perspective" (2021) 10 *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development* 13.

³ M Lethoko "Children and youth as agents of climate change impact in South Africa" (2014) 12 *Commonwealth Youth and Development* 75 75.

⁴ Lethoko (2014) 12 *Commonwealth Youth and Development* 75 75.

⁵ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children *The climate crisis and violence against children* (2022) 4-5.

1 2 What are your recommendations to decision-makers and policymakers, including governments, civil society, international organizations, the United Nations, and others, to advance human rights in the future?

Every child is entitled to the right to education. Given the significant role the educational process plays in the development of the child, discriminatory denial of access to educational opportunities can significantly undermine the child's rights. Addressing gender inequalities in the educational system is therefore an integral component of the States obligation to promote the right to education for every child.

Addressing the issues experienced by children in the realisation of their right to education ultimately requires a pragmatic approach comprised of policy creation, reform, and implementation. Given the multifaceted nature of these obstacles, States would benefit from adopting a child-centred participatory approach to the development of interventions which incorporate the views and opinions of affected children and their wider communities. Including children within their wider community in the educational process will go a long way towards spreading information as the benefits of educational opportunities.

The right to participation in conjunction with the right to freedom of expression⁶ is an empowering right.⁷ Combatting human rights issues requires those who experience them to receive a platform through which to voice their concerns and propose solutions. Promoting the participation of local communities can go a long way to promoting the development of durable solutions.

1 3 What commitments and actions can young people take towards advancing human rights in the future?

Young people can advance human rights by raising awareness, advocating through social media and events, volunteering, engaging in dialogue, joining youth organizations, participating in civic activities, expressing creativity, supporting marginalized groups, and staying informed about global issues. The development of

⁶ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990) 1577 UNTS 3 protects the right to freedom of expression in article 13 which includes the right to "seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds." The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (adopted 27 June 1981 entered into force 21 October 1986) 1520 UNTS 217 includes the freedom of expression in article 7 which states that "every child who is capable of communication his or her own views shall be assured the rights to express his [or her] opinions in all matters."

⁷ Sanz-Caballero (2013) *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics* 8.

more advanced methods of communication, and the increased use of social media, provides a medium through which young people can advance change. This advancement also carries with it the burden of ensuring that it is used responsibly to promote a culture of human rights, transparency, and accountability.

Within the context of climate change, children are becoming more aware of the impact of increased activity on the sustainability of resilience of our environment.⁸ Moreover, “children can also help climate-proof local infrastructure, strengthen community early warning systems, increase climate change awareness, and serve as a vital link between the local government and communities.”⁹ Yet, despite the innovative solutions proffered by children when included in climate change discussions, children and young people are forgotten in such global discussions.¹⁰

⁸ Gibbons (2014) *Health Hum. Rights* 24 and Boshoff (2017) *Afr. Hum. Rights Yearb.* 24.

⁹ Gibbons (2014) *Health Hum. Rights* 24 and Boshoff (2017) *Afr. Hum. Rights Yearb.* 24.

¹⁰ *Rights* 19.