

Guaranteeing children's right to participate: the BIG STEP needed



You are invited to a Side Event at the 69th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, co-organised by the Finnish Permanent Mission to the UN, the Council of Europe, and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children

19 NOVEMBER 2014, 13.15 – 14.30

Conference room 7 (CR-7) in the General Assembly Building,
UN Headquarters, New York

In 1989, the adoption of the UN Convention on the rights of the child set in motion a paradigm shift in the way the State and society relate to children. Children are no longer considered as future members of society, subjects of charity and unable to form and express opinions that matter. The Convention requires states to recognize children as full citizens and holders of human rights, including the right to participate in decisions affecting them. Child participation is the process by which children and young people can influence decision-making which affects their lives - whether at home, in the community, at school or in individual legal and administrative matters or through procedures that are of concern to them. Children's right to be heard and to participate is a fundamental part of democratic citizenship and central to many crucial topics such as protection from violence and the right to self-determination. Child participation includes the right to freedom of expression (including the right to seek, receive and impart information), freedom of association and peaceful assembly, the right to participate in judicial and administrative procedures, and to access and make use of complaint mechanisms.

Keynote speakers include:

- ▶ Ms Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Director General of Democracy, Council of Europe
- ▶ Ms Pauliine Koskelo, President of the Supreme Court of Finland
- ▶ Ms Marta Santos Pais, United Nations SRSG on Violence against Children
- ▶ Ms Kirsten Sandberg, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child
- ▶ Mr Jorge Joaquin Laslop Yáñez and Ms Gal Rozic, youth representatives, Latin America Network of Children and Adolescents on ICTs (RedNATIC)



MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN
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While child participation is increasingly recognised as having a very positive impact on the child, the family, the community and society at large, children's participatory rights continue to be perceived as optional. From governments to parents, research institutions, the judiciary, social workers and carers, many overlook their obligation to guarantee the child's right to participate and still have to be convinced of its interest and importance.

In addition, child participation is perceived by decision makers as challenging, if not impossible to guarantee. Providing access to concrete guidance and good practices on how to mainstream child participation into the many situations in which it is relevant must therefore become a major strategic objective at international, national and local level.

This year, while we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a BIG STEP forward is still overdue to fully guarantee the child's right to participate. To take such a step, the international community should both build upon the human rights foundation of the right to participate and considerably invest in the promotion of policies, tools and processes aimed at achieving safe and meaningful child participation.

Our side event will discuss the contribution of a number of key international legal standards on the promotion of children's right to participate, including the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention), as well as the Council of Europe Recommendation on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18. The event will also present the Assessment Tool designed by the Council of Europe to provide specific and measurable indicators with which states can begin to measure child participation. The tool is the result of a process starting with policy analysis carried out in a number of volunteer countries, including Finland. Finally, the event will also be an opportunity to share the most successful and recent child-friendly materials developed for and with children to increase their awareness and understanding of their rights.



"We children know about the nature and depth of our own problems best, so we have to be part of finding the solutions to the problems. There is a need to help those of us who are in trouble to find a way out of our problems. We want to be part of democratic space that influences our life because 'We are Citizens Today.'"

The Caux Declaration, Children as Actors for Transforming Society (CATS) World Conference, 1 August 2014

"We have to explain that every person, be they a child or adult, has the right to express freely their opinions and those have to be respected; to explain that if children's views are not taken into account, many problems will remain unresolved for a long time."

Moldovan child who took part in the consultation on the Council of Europe Policy Review on Child and Youth Participation in Moldova, 2013

"Girls are withdrawn from schools and they are forced to marry for purpose of profit. Since the family consent is sufficient in cases of early marriages, they never ask the consent of the girl."

Turkish 14 year old girl participating in the Council of Europe ONE in FIVE Campaign to stop sexual violence against children, 2014