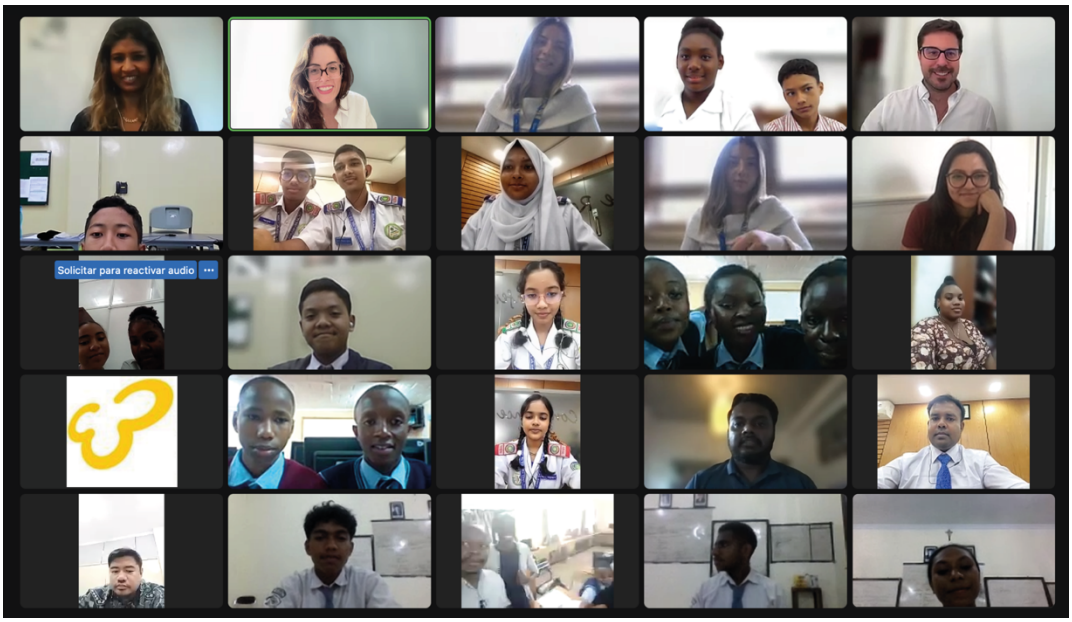
ARIGATOU INTERNATIONAL
All for Children

Voices of Children on the Promotion of Inclusive Education for Peace
Recommendations to Implement the United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution on Ensuring Quality Education for Peace and Tolerance for Every Child

Outcomes of the consultation with children



INTRODUCTION

As stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), children have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Given the profound influence that education has on childhood development, it is essential that children are actively involved in shaping the policies and practices that impact them - particularly in matters related to to human rights, peace, understanding, and the needs of the most vulnerable. Education should help children develop the skills needed to contribute to building peace in their communities.

A virtual consultation was held with children from four different countries on September 23, 2024, to explore the importance of promoting quality and inclusive education that fosters peace and understanding. The goal of the consultation was to gather insights and recommendations from young people to support the preparation of a report on the topic that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is preparing for the Human Rights Council (HRC) to provide specific recommendations on how to develop accessible, inclusive, equitable and quality education for peace and tolerance for every child, especially children in the most vulnerable situations,.

The two-hour Zoom session brought together twenty children aged 12 to 17 from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kenya, and Seychelles. The children were selected from schools implementing education programs to foster peace, mutual understanding and respect, appreciation of diversity, and critical thinking as part of an Ethics Education Fellowship Program.

The Ethics Education Fellowship Program is a collaborative initiative between Arigatou International, the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace, KAICIID International Dialogue Centre, the Muslim Council of Elders, the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity, UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa, in partnership with the Ministries of Education of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kenya, Mauritius, Nepal and Seychelles, and the support of the National Commissions for UNESCO. In 2022, Ministries of Education of the participating countries made institutional commitments to implement ethics education in schools, contributing to their national educational goals and ultimately fostering more inclusive and peaceful societies.

Children who have gone through the Ethics Education Fellowship programs have been provided with key tools to enhance their critical thinking, their ability to make ethical decisions, challenge their stereotypes and prejudices and work collaboratively with others across differences to make a difference in their communities. Some of them have initiated child-led projects to address issues of discrimination in their schools, raise awareness about climate change or problems affecting them. With this experience, children from the Ethics Education Fellowship are key actors in providing inputs on how to advance quality education for peace.

CONSULTATION STRUCTURE

Before the event, children received a package of child-friendly materials including a simplified version of the UN HRC Resolution (A/HRC/RES/54/5), a child-friendly concept

note, and other relevant documents on the topic like a simplified version of the revised UNESCO 1974 Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development to ensure informed participation in the session.

Teachers received guidelines to conduct a preliminary discussion on the topic inside the classroom using the above-mentioned materials. The goal was to explore how the participation in ethics education programs has transformed children's perspectives on the world, their relationships with their peers in the school and in their communities and have equipped them to positively contribute to their societies. The children were encouraged to share their insights and offer recommendations to government officials on the importance of education for peace and understanding.

After these reflections, five children from each school were appointed to join the online consultation.

During the event, participating children had the opportunity to get to know each other and learn more about the HRC, the 54/5 resolution, and the purpose of their participation in the consultation. The session was divided into two plenary discussions and two moments for deeper reflections in smaller groups, as follows:

1. A small-group session to reflect on case studies that explore discrimination, lack of safe environments, bullying, misinformation, and gender inequality among other issues that affect children and hinder their ability to learn and live together in harmony.
2. A plenary session to share insights from the case studies on how education for peace and tolerance can help overcome challenges that affect children in their countries and communities.
3. A small-group session for children to identify specific actions they want their governments to take to ensure that education for peace is integrated into all schools nationwide and benefits all children, particularly the most vulnerable.
4. A final plenary session to share all recommendations and ways forward.

PART ONE: EXPLORING ISSUES THAT AFFECT CHILDREN

In small groups of around seven, participants explored issues affecting children's well-being and their ability to learn. These included: displacement due to conflicts, discrimination based on religious and cultural differences, overcrowded classrooms and

lack of safe learning environments, corporal punishment in schools, gender inequality, bullying, online harassment, and hate speech.

While exploring discrimination, children acknowledged its prevalence in many schools, along with bullying. A child from Seychelles shared that in his school there are groups of children that do not get along because of their cultural differences leading to incidents of bullying.

Participants suggested that governments implement anti-bullying policies to prevent these incidents in schools. They also emphasized the role of education for peace in addressing these issues. For instance, a child from Bangladesh shared his experience following an ethics education program. He described how learning about other religions and visiting different places of worship helped him understand the cultural practices of his peers and appreciate the diversity around him.

Other participants echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the importance of encouraging children from all religions to promote mutual understanding. A child from Indonesia highlighted the need to create spaces where children can learn more about each other. He explained an initiative created in his school when new students arrive, a sort of "meet and greet" that allows children to get to know each other. In his view, the creation of this space for interaction has helped to reduce bullying in the school.

One of his classmates added that fostering trust between students and teachers is also important in addressing discrimination and bullying."If there is trust and the teacher can pay individual attention [to children] this can help minimize the issue", he said.

Children from Seychelles highlighted the need for more sports, competitions, and social spaces to promote interaction among students from diverse backgrounds. They suggested that schools should actively engage in discussions and awareness campaigns both within and outside the school community to address issues such as bullying and discrimination.

A child from Bangladesh also suggested that "schools should have posters in the walls (…) that share information of what is happening in the world".

Through a story about an overcrowded classroom, children explored the importance of ensuring safe learning environments. Participants reflected on how bullying, harassment, and corporal punishment can harm children and hinder their ability to learn and relate positively with others.

Participants from Bangladesh and Kenya shared their experiences with overcrowded classrooms, a commonality for children in their countries. They also emphasized the difficulties of accessing learning resources and technology, with one child noting inadequate computer lab facilities and opportunities. Furthermore, they recognized the disproportionate challenges faced by girls, including what a child from Bangladesh described as "inequitable sanitation facilities".

Children from Kenya emphasized the need for more teachers in public schools. They described how students in their school often compete for front-row seats due to the limited attention that teachers can give to individual students in overcrowded classrooms. A Kenyan child suggested that "the government should build more classrooms to separate students" and ensure more equitable learning opportunities.

Other participants also stressed the need for more teachers in their schools, particularly female teachers "who can provide guidance to young girls" said a girl from Bangladesh.

PART TWO: PROVIDING RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the discussions during the first session, the second session provided an opportunity for children to contemplate and propose measures that governments should implement to ensure equitable access to quality education that fosters peace and tolerance.

The following are the children's recommendations:

- Governments should establish antibullying policies, as well as laws that prohibit teachers from using physical punishment.

- Ethics education programs that promote peace and understanding should be integrated into the curriculum of all schools.

- Education for peace should be infused into all subjects, rather than being a standalone course, integrating it into disciplines like history, geography, or even sports classes.

- All teachers should learn how to implement ethics education programs and governments should invest in training them.

- Governments should invest more in education and provide funds for schools to have better facilities, more teachers and classrooms, and more learning resources like books and technology.

- Schools should establish class size limits and incorporate flexible schedules to reduce overcrowding, such as staggered schedules or year-round education.

- Peace education should not be limited to textbooks but should incorporate practical activities that children can engage in with their teachers.

- Schools should implement exchange programs that allow children to interact with students coming from different backgrounds.

- Awareness-raising campaigns should be conducted to highlight the significance of incorporating education for peace into school curricula.

- Schools should establish a day of the year to organize events that promote peace and understanding.

- Governments should implement programs to address fake news and promote responsible use of social media.

- Governments should incorporate more policies to ensure equal access to education for all children, including those from marginalized communities.

- Teachers should permanently encourage open dialogue, teamwork, and respect for differences in the classroom.

By the end of the session, children were explained how their inputs would contribute to the development of the OHCHR report to the UN Human Rights Council. They were encouraged to continue these important dialogues within their own schools and communities, advocating for the changes they envision. To support their efforts, a child-friendly version of this report will be provided.