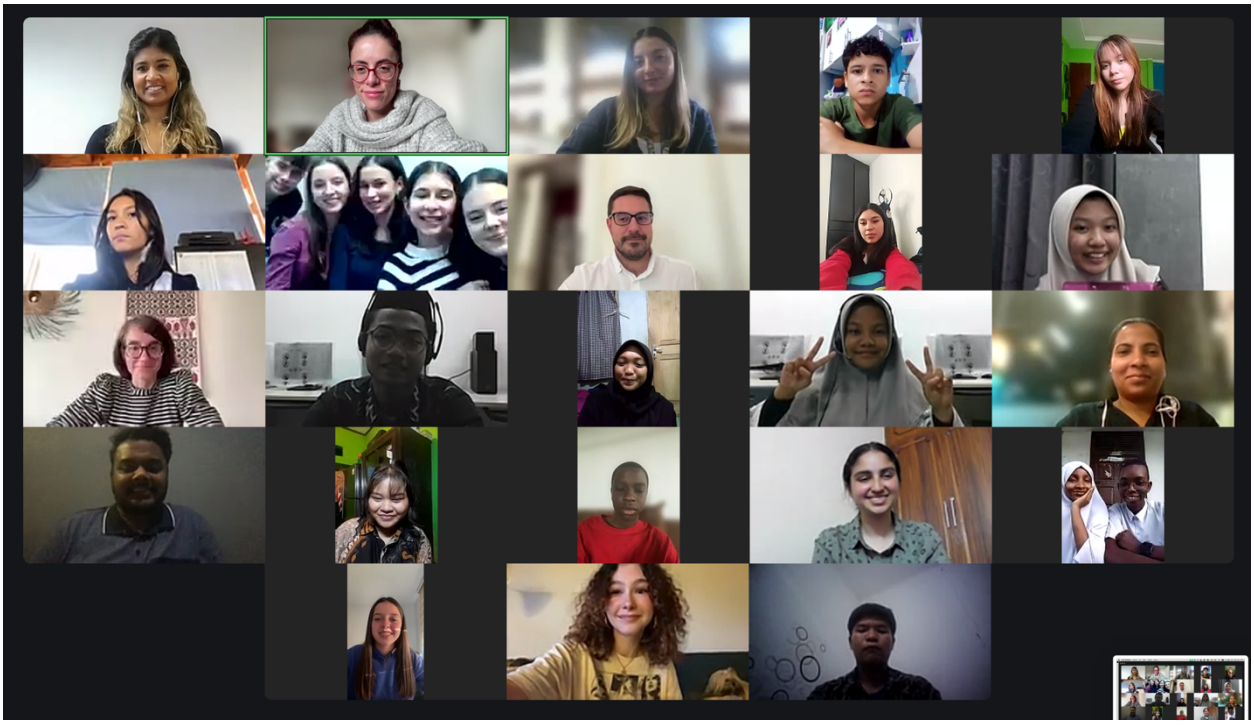
ARIGATOU INTERNATIONAL
All for Children

Voices of Children on the Implementation of the United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution on Ensuring Quality Education for Peace and Tolerance for Every Child

Outcomes of the second round of consultations with children



INTRODUCTION

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) affirms children's right to participate in decisions affecting their lives. It also requires States to provide education to children which has as its aim respect for human rights and which prepares children for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin; (see Art. 29). Given education's essential role in shaping childhood development, children must be actively involved in shaping educational policies and practices, especially those related to human rights, peace, understanding, and the needs of vulnerable groups. Education should not only equip children with the skills necessary to contribute to peaceful communities but should also be designed with their perspectives, needs, and recommendations in mind.

In line with this commitment, the UN Human Rights Council, in its resolution 54/5 "Ensuring quality education for peace and tolerance for every child" adopted on October 11, 2023, mandated the UN Human Rights Office to develop a comprehensive report with specific recommendations on how to develop accessible, inclusive, equitable, and quality education for peace and tolerance for every child, particularly those in the most vulnerable situations, and how to incorporate it into educational programs.

To gather children's insights and inform the development of this report, on November 5, 2024, the UN Human Rights Office along with Arigatou International hosted a virtual consultation engaging 22 children from diverse backgrounds in a dialogue on human rights, education, and peace.

Children aged 13 to 17 from Bosnia & Herzegovina, Ecuador, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, Norway, Romania, and Tanzania participated in the dialogue supported by English and Spanish interpretation.

The consultation aimed to provide a safe and inclusive space for children to share their experiences and recommendations with peers from around the world to reflect on the exercise of their human rights and how education can equip them to address challenges like bullying, discrimination, and inequality in their schools and communities.

The event also sought to gather recommendations from children on how to ensure every child can benefit from a quality and inclusive education that promotes peace and understanding.

CONSULTATION DETAILS

To prepare for meaningful and informed participation in the consultation, before the event children received a package of child-friendly materials that included a simplified version of the UN HRC Resolution, a child-friendly concept note, and an explainer video about the purpose of holding these consultations.

The online session included a plenary discussion followed by smaller group sessions for deeper reflections, structured as follows:

1. An introductory moment to explore the background and purpose of the consultation and how the contributions from children will feed the preparation of the above-mentioned report.
2. A collective moment to get to know each other and break the ice.
3. A break-out session to reflect on case studies exploring issues that affect children and hinder their ability to learn and live together harmoniously. In this session, children delved into how education for peace can help overcome these challenges. They also identified recommendations on what countries could do to ensure quality education for peace for all children, especially the most vulnerable.
4. A final plenary session to share the results of the break-out sessions, recommendations, and ways forward.

PART ONE: EXPLORING ISSUES THAT AFFECT CHILDREN

During the dialogue, children emphasized the importance of accessible and quality education for all, regardless of a child's background, including characteristics related to their ethnicity, gender identity and migration status. They reflected on how access to education can be difficult to obtain for female students in certain parts of the world. Children highlighted that, in these situations, girls are often discouraged from continuing their studies and are instead pressured into early marriage. “I think we need to spread awareness about the need for girls to continue education and to have the right to pursue quality education like boys,” commented a child from Kenya.

Children from Bosnia and Herzegovina reported that in their communities and schools, barriers to access quality education are less related to gender and more to economic inequality. Children from low-income families often struggle to attend school as "they get bullied because of their old clothing or because they do not have food. They are excluded by the other children," highlighted a Bosnian child.

Participants also discussed the positive and negative impacts of technology on their lives. They highlighted the need for digital literacy education and online safety measures, as the influence of social media can negatively impact children's mental health, leading to issues such as depression.

In the digital world children “are exposed to all sorts of content without filters (…) We cannot distinguish [between content that is appropriate for children and content that is not] and we incorporate all this in our way of behaving. I think it is important to educate children on what content is good and what is bad and to educate parents also”, mentioned a child from Kenya.

Children also explored issues like discrimination and violence through case studies that helped them visualize real-world scenarios where children from minority groups might face discrimination in school. They called for measures to prevent and address these problems, including the need for schools to foster empathy, critical thinking, and conflict resolution skills in children.

On the subject of misinformation, a child from Nigeria reported how armed groups in his country create fear and spread fake news, such as rumors of potential school attacks. This leads to children and parents being scared and results in many children not attending school for long periods due to the fear installed in the community.

Children recognized that discrimination and exclusion often arise from societal biases, such as negative perceptions of migrants. According to a child from Ecuador, this perception can change when children develop critical thinking skills. Therefore, it is fundamental that schools and teachers foster this life skill in children.

Children from Romania described education in their country as restrictive and outdated, with textbooks that haven't been updated in two decades. Although the group of children from Romania reported attending a more open and progressive school, they highlighted that, in general, "education should help us forming our way of thinking and

not tell us what to think. Think outside the box, analyze things, and be more creative. Not just memorizing."

Children stressed the importance of teaching about human rights and promoting intercultural dialogue.

Some participating children shared experiences of engaging in intercultural activities, interfaith prayers, and visits to diverse places of worship either through their schools or their community engagement. According to them, these experiences have significantly contributed to their development of respect for differences and appreciation for the rich tapestry of cultures and beliefs that exist in our world.

PART TWO: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussions, the children offered the following recommendations:

- Governments should prioritize funding for quality education and ensure equitable access to quality education for all children. This includes training teachers to promote peace and human rights in school and nurture life skills in children such as empathy, respect, and critical thinking.

- Schools should implement policies and practices to ensure a safe learning environment free from bullying, discrimination, and violence. This includes teaching children about values and the importance of living together in peace.

- Teachers and schools should not focus solely on grades. Education should not be merely about memorization but rather about motivating children to think critically and be creative.

- Children (and parents) should be taught to use technology and social media responsibly and critically.

- Human rights education should not only be taught to children but also to adults.

- The school's curriculum should be updated. Sexuality education and gender equality should be among the subjects to be included along with ethics education programs that promote non-discrimination, peace and understanding.

- Schools and communities should promote intercultural and interfaith exchanges and dialogue. This could include interfaith prayers, visits to diverse places of worship, or intercultural festivals.

- Teachers should strive to build confidence and trust among their students so children feel safe to express themselves and ask for help when needed.

The virtual consultation reflected the commitment of the UN Human Rights Office and Arigatou International to amplifying children's voices and ensuring their perspectives are considered in policymaking. Children’s recommendations generated from this consultation will be invaluable in shaping a more just and peaceful future for all children.