

Action for Girls

Newsletter of the NGO Committee on UNICEF Working Group on Girls (WGG) and its International Network for Girls (INFG).

Girls Speak Out

Commemorating the Twentieth Anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the panel "About Me and My Sisters" featured five extraordinary girls who have contributed creatively at the local level with a sense of responsibility to girls globally. Khadija Lalani, Weston, Connecticut; Adeola Okoduwa, Bronx, New York; Sydney Rotman, Great Neck, New York; Hsin-Jung Wei, Parsippany, New Jersey; and Abbey Flynn, Aurora, Illinois (via Skype) spoke on November 2, 2009, at a meeting of the Working Group on Girls.

Two of the girls, Abbey Flynn and Khadija Lalani, had participated in the CRC Symposium on the basis of their winning essays on how the passage of the CRC in the United States would affect a given situation. Ms Flynn wrote about how the U.S. passage of the CRC would no longer allow children to be incarcerated in prisons for adults. She was given a case of a 14-year-old named Paul who was given a seven-year prison sentence in an adult prison. Flynn wrote that the punishment for a child who commits crimes must be appropriate for a child and that Paul "needs to be given back his childhood." Ms Lalani wrote about how ratification of the CRC would affect a hypothetical student named Shiva in a weak school in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood. She wrote that passage of the CRC would require that all children have access to education with qualified teachers and new textbooks as stated in articles 28 and 29.

Each of the five high school girls spoke about their accomplishments working both locally and globally in their communities. Sydney Rotman organized and runs a family literacy center in Great Neck, "to bring parents and children together in a learning environment." Parents, who are Asian, Iranian, Hispanic, and Native American, accompany their children to the center twice a week to work on their English and share their family's culture. Rotman recruits the academic tutors and troubleshoots problems. Her program counts as a community service credit for students who participate.

Abbey Flynn wrote a CRC Resolution that was passed by the Aurora City Council and developed a toolkit to enable people to implement the CRC Resolution. Her high school internship at a local law school is on children's rights, in particular issues of poverty, violence, and education. She also works with Amnesty International on children. Hsin-Jung Wei came to the United States from Taiwan at age 4. She studies Mandarin, interns at the Chamber of Commerce, and has been nominated a student leader. She has volunteered her time in Mexico to build housing and volunteers during the summer in an environmental camp.



Girls who spoke at WGG meeting, Sydney Rotman, Catherine Moore, Khadija Lalani and Hsin-Jung Wei. Not shown: Adeola Okoduwa and Abbey Flynn



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Adeola Okoduwa, whose parents immigrated from Nigeria and Jamaica, attends the Academy of Mount Saint Ursula in the Bronx, where she has been elected class president for two years. She attended the Ursuline Conference on women's leadership in Kentucky and the Brotherhood Sisters School's Summer Liberation Program on activism. She emphasized "women can be strong as long as we work together." The fifth speaker, Khadija Lalani, whose parents immigrated from Pakistan, believes in the importance of advocacy. She formed a UNICEF Club at her school to educate students on global issues concerning children and to fundraise on the issue of childhood mortality.

The WGG members who attended the panel were very impressed with the commitment, intelligence, and accomplishments of the five young women. They are the embodiment of WGG friend Jane Stevlingson's words quoted by co-chair and moderator Catherine Moore: "It is important to do well, but more important to do good."

The event was part of the WGG's recognition of our long time leader Hourig Babikian.

Susan O'Malley

-- International Federation of Business and Professional Women

The Convention on the Rights of the Child Celebrates 20th Anniversary

There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they can grow up in peace.
-Kofi Annan

November 20, 2009, marks the 20th Anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRS), the first legally binding treaty to focus on the universal realization of human rights for all children. To date, 193 countries have ratified the Convention, pronouncing the global commitment to the rights of children and the core human value that the world's children deserve a world in which they are respected and protected.

There has been significant progress in realizing the rights outlined by the Convention, but much more is still to be done in a world where many children are viewed as property and not as rights-bearing individuals. The CRC acts as an important foundation, but keeping governments accountable to their commitments is essential if children's rights are to be realized.



Good governance is vital to the realization and protection of children's rights. This includes accountability, participation, non-discrimination, transparency, and integrity against corruption. The approach in policymaking needs to be centered on child rights, as these nations have already committed to acting in the best interest of children. For example, transparency empowers participation in the accountability that budgeted money for education actually goes toward education. Without a focus on good governance and accountability placed on governments from civil society, universal rights of the child will remain merely on paper and not in the lives of children worldwide.

Governance needs to be answerable for advancing human rights and human dignity. Only by keeping governments accountable are we ever to see a world where children's human rights are valued and fulfilled, and where the full potential of all children can be reached. Through engaging with the systems at hand and the tools at hand, we can make children's rights a reality.

What can you do?

- Voice the necessity of the realization of children's rights to government leaders, media and others in the community; educate yourself and help to raise public awareness about the CRC
- Put pressure on all levels governments to fulfill commitments to pass laws and advance policies centered on the rights of children. Challenge politicians to make children's rights a priority.
- Contact your local UNICEF field office or national committee to see how you can become more involved in advancing the CRC locally.

For more information and access to the full text of the CRC, visit <http://www.unicef.org/crc>

--VIVAT International

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WGG Task Force Formed to Support President Obama's White House Council on Women and Girls

In March 2009, within just weeks of taking office, President Obama (USA) formed the White House Council on Women and Girls to ensure that U.S. government agencies take into account the needs and concerns of women and girls. One of the Council's goals is to "find new ways to prevent violence against women, at home and abroad." In response a WGG Task Force was formed to see how WGG might help. The Task Force follows the work of the Council and other key U.S. leaders' promoting the rights of women and girls globally.

We are pleased with the efforts these leaders have taken thus far. In May 2009 California Senator Barbara Boxer led a Senate Subcommittee Hearing on Global Women's Issues that focused on rape as a weapon of war. After hours of listening to testimonies on this topic, Senator Boxer was clearly touched and promised to help. She wrote a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton calling for the creation of a new UN Representative specifically dedicated to this issue.

After visiting women and girl victims of rape and abuse in the war-torn Democratic Republic of the Congo, Secretary Hillary Clinton, while chairing the UN Security Council, introduced Resolution 1888. Strongly supported by U.S. Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice, it passed unanimously on September 29, 2009. UNSCR 1888 calls for the creation of a Special

Representative to the UN Secretary General who will press to end sexual violence against women and girls in armed conflict, end impunity, increase the response to victims, and recommend UN sanctions when necessary. UNSCR 1888 addresses the reporting process and collection of data that will change policies. This is a momentous step toward ending the suffering of women and girls worldwide.

There is, however, still more work to do. Two key UN treaties that affect girls, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), still need U.S. ratification. President Obama supports both treaties and has forwarded CEDAW to the Department of Justice and CRC to the State Department for review prior to Senate ratification.

We welcome all ideas by global NGOs to help us in our endeavors to work with the White House Council on Women and Girls in their continued efforts to promote girls' rights. Please write to us at NGOsforgirls@gmail.com.

Jill Marie Sen

-- Chair, NGO Committee on UNICEF/ WGG Task Force on the White House Council on Women and Girls

WGG Plans for CSW 54/Beijing + 15

In March 2010 the Fifty-Fourth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women will review the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly, emphasizing the sharing of experiences and good practices with a view to overcoming remaining obstacles and new challenges that have arisen since Beijing, including those related to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals (CSW Resolution 53/1 – E/2009/27).

The Working Group on Girls (WGG) is committed to ensuring that girls are present and that their needs and concerns are adequately addressed by the Commission. To that end the WGG will

- Publish an assessment of global implementation of Section L. The Girl-Child of the Beijing Platform for Action
- Submit a written statement focusing on girls to the CSW
- Welcome Girls to CSW 54
- Encourage NGOs and member States to include girls in their delegations
- Facilitate girls' participation at CSW 54
- Advocate on behalf of girls with Member States and UN Agencies
- Plan preparatory and parallel events which focus on girls' rights and concerns
- Communicate information about CSW 54 to our electronic international network

Co-chairs: Ann Scholz ~ School Sisters of Notre Dame
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Girls Gone Activist! Empowers Girls

Girls Gone Activist! is a bilingual manual published by School Girls Unite (SGU), a youth-led initiative of 20 girls from outside of Washington, D.C., that advocates for universal education and empowerment of girls. In the manual the girls explain the process that they used to mobilize, organize, advocate, fundraise, and publicize their project providing school fees, books, supplies, and tutors to 75 girls in Mali in partnership with their sister organization in Mali.

School Girls Unite! believes that the education of women and girls is the answer to most of the world's problems and that addressing this issue can transform the world. Girls Gone Activist! is a compilation of the voices of girls speaking for justice, inspiring young girls everywhere to get involved and to realize their own power and capability to enact change.

This partnership of SGU and their sister organization in Mali was created to empower girls in Mali, where it is estimated that 85% of girls are illiterate, to voice the injustices that they see around them. The girls now realize that education is a human right. Achieving universal education empowers people, breaks cycles of poverty, violence, and hunger, and is the basis for societal development and a better world.

The SGU girls have furthered the accomplishment of Millennium Development Goals 2 & 3: Universal Primary Education and Gender Equality. One of the U.S. girls created a video petition against child marriage that was brought to members of Congress, who agreed to be official co-sponsors of the International Child Marriage Prevention Act. One of the girls, Shayna, said, "Getting political leaders involved in this global issue is a great glimmer of hope for our generation to care and believe that we are capable of tackling such a large problem without being intimidated by our leaders and our differences."

Girls Gone Activist! is a tool for girls worldwide to get involved and to

Thanks to Co-Chair Mary Ann Strain of Passionists International, WGG has an eye-catching, newly updated website. Please pay us a visit at: <http://www.girlsrights.org>.

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Please address questions about the articles to the authors at wggs@girlsrights.org Reprinting of articles is encouraged with credit given to *Action for Girls*. We welcome articles by NGOs.

girls. The manual is an action guide to inspire other young girls (and boys) to organize to make a difference, and the ways in which they can do so.

Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon that you can use to change the world." These girls have realized this, and are mobilizing their efforts in remarkable ways.

Girls Gone Activist! may be downloaded in pdf format or ordered on <http://www.schoolgirlsunite.org>.

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