



The Girl Child Today

UN Commission on the Status of Women to Focus on Girls



Girls—their rights and their concerns—will be the focus of the 2007 meeting of the United Nations [Commission on the Status of Women](#) (CSW). Each year the Commission meets to review the condition of women's political, economic, and social rights. This year, the Commission, which will meet from 26 February to 9 March, will determine exactly what governments and citizens can do to end all forms of violence and discrimination against the girl child.

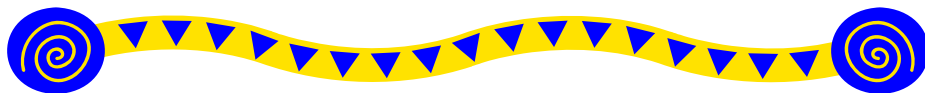
For two weeks member governments of the UN and the global community will have the opportunity to focus their attention on the needs and concerns of girls. They will review the research and findings of UN agencies, consider recommendations from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and, most especially, listen to girls themselves.

The Commission hopes to make concrete recommendations to speed up the accomplishment of the promises made to girls at the [Fourth World Conference on Women](#) (1995) in Beijing, and repeated in the [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs)—to eliminate discrimination and violence against the girl child and to guarantee girls' rights to education, health care, and their full human development.

The Commission was established in 1946 to prepare recommendations and reports to the [Economic and Social Council](#) (ECOSOC) on women's rights and to encourage the achievement of equal rights for men and women. It began with 15 government members and now includes of [45 members](#) elected by the Economic and Social Council for a four year term.

Following the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the Commission began regularly to review progress for girls and women in the critical areas of concern outlined in the [Beijing Declaration](#) and the [Beijing Platform for Action](#). This year the Commission will focus especially on progress made regarding the promises to girls outlined in [Section L](#) of the Platform.

The Commission meets each year for a period of ten working days. [The Division for the Advancement of Women](#) (DAW) works closely with governments, its partners in the UN system, and civil society helping to make the world aware of all the concerns of women and girls.



Our Dreams...

We all have dreams—[The Working Group on Girls](#) (WGG), [UNICEF](#), and the [Division for the Advancement of Women](#) (DAW) dream of the day when the rights of the girl child are protected, when each girl is guaranteed an education, when the health needs of the girl child are recognized, when zones of peace for children in armed conflict are created and respected—when all girls can live free from fear and want.

Making those dreams come true requires all our efforts. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) needs to hear from girls about what they think is important. Your experiences, your thoughts, and your feelings count. Tell the CSW how together we can honor girls' rights.

Please read the stories of Tanisha and Xiuhua that follow. Listen to the hopes of Omer, Chloe, and Julie. Gather a group of friends to discuss what you have learned. Tell your own stories and then tell the CSW what you think—join [Voices of Youth's](#) Forum—“**Stop Violence and Discrimination Against Girls**”

Join the Forum—The World Needs Your Voice!

Every day, in every part of the world, girls are kept out of school, hit, ignored, forced to marry and have sex, sold as slaves, made to fight in wars and asked to sit silently while decisions are made for them - about them.

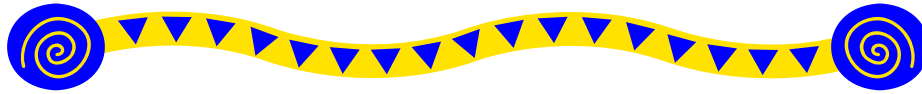
Governments are asking how they can work to stop this violence and discrimination against girls. This question cannot be answered without you. Youth know their issues best - and have clear ideas about how to solve problems.

UNICEF's [Voices of Youth](#) is gathering the recommendations of girls and boys and will present them at the 51st annual Commission on the Status of Women at United Nations headquarters in February 2007. You can influence how the world works to stop discrimination and violence against girls.

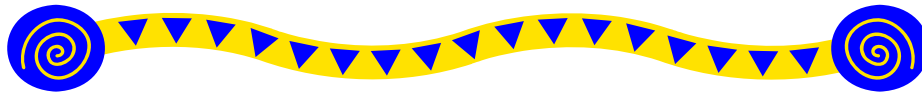
What to do:

Join the Voice's of Youth Girls' Forum which will begin on **1 December 2006**.

1. Read a youth-friendly version of the expert's report and tell us if you agree or disagree with what it says. The report talks about how girls are endangered by violence and unfair treatment and suggests ways governments, and their citizens, can stop the discrimination. You can find the report at <http://www.unicef.org/voy/>. Click on “Stop violence and discrimination against girls”.
2. Answer the questions at the end.
3. Send your answers back to us by **15 January 2007**. You can send us your answers in 3 ways:
 - **Online:** Log on to Voices of Youth (<http://www.unicef.org/voy/>) and click on “Stop violence and discrimination against girls” and fill in the online questionnaire.
 - **Email:** voy@unicef.org, with “Stop violence and discrimination against girls” in the subject line.
 - **Mail:** Voices of Youth, 3 UN Plaza, New York City, NY 10017.



We need to Hear your Voice!



Real Life Stories—Tanisha and Sexual Abuse

All girls have the right to be protected from violence and abuse, but not all girls enjoy that right. Tanisha knows how dangerous childhood and adolescence can be. (UNICEF)

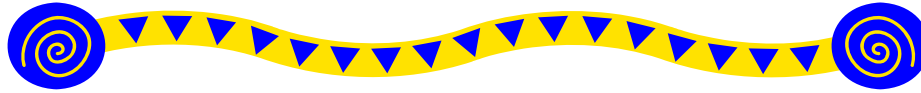
Tanisha was born in Jamaica and came to the US when she was two and a half. She had a history of sexual abuse. Her stepfather had sexually assaulted her at the age of seven, and her step uncles raped her at the age of 12.

"By the time I was 16 I had a daughter," Tanisha says. "I was still in high school and didn't have much money to support my child ... I needed a way to get some money fast, and I couldn't get a job."

Tanisha talked to a girl at school who she knew had been drawn into prostitution. That evening the girl introduced Tanisha to a pimp, and he began to prostitute Tanisha as well. After a short while he sold her to another pimp, who kept her basically imprisoned in a brothel with nine other girls, seven of whom were also under age. Each girl had to hand all the money they made straight over to the pimp, and they were forbidden any contact with their families. "I wasn't allowed to call my mother," Tanisha recalls. "I wasn't allowed to go home. I couldn't see my daughter. I couldn't do anything." Then Tanisha was arrested and jailed for prostitution. While she was in jail, she finally found the help she needed through a program called Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS). "I've been there for about nine months now," says Tanisha. "I currently work as a youth leader. I'm going back to school."

Prostitution, though illegal, is not uncommon in New York, as in most other big cities around the world. The true number of children involved is not known, but Susan Breault of the Paul and Lisa Program, another voluntary organization dedicated to helping homeless and exploited children in New York, estimates that there are roughly five thousand prostituted children in the city today.

How did this story make you feel? What are the issues here? What is your opinion about what has happened to Tanisha? Do you know any girls or young women who have to worry about money to support herself? What can we do to help other girls from being victims of this kind of violence? What, if anything should governments do to ensure that girls' are protected from violence and exploitation?



Real Life Stories—Xiuhua and the Right to Education

Many of us take the right of education for granted unfortunately; many young girls do not have the chance to attend school. Xiuhua tells her story ... (UNICEF)

When she was only 10 years old, Xiuhua had to leave school to help her parents in the fields. "Parents often think if they take their girls out of school, they can save some money," says Mu Huiqin, deputy principal of Xiuhua's school in Guyuan, in west China's Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

Mu and others try to persuade parents to let their girls return to school, but with little success. Xiuhua's father, like many others, believes girls are better off getting married. "I was crying behind the door when I heard my father say these words to my teacher," Xiuhua says.

But five years ago, Xiuhua's prospects changed. A non-formal education project for teenage girls came to the area, teaching such skills as tailoring, embroidery, and special techniques for growing corn, wheat and watermelon in Guyuan, where it is very cold and little rain falls. "We invited local experts to train the drop-out girls, giving them a ticket to get out of poverty," says Mu.

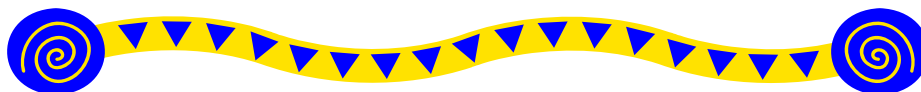
Over the past two years, the training programmers in the region have helped 1,800 girls. Xiuhua has learned tailoring. Every day, after helping her mother with household chores, she practices her skills. She already supplements the family income by making clothes for villagers.

Xiuhua says that when she helps put food on the table, she feels a sense of hope. "And when you see hope, your sense of humor returns. You can even tease your parents."

Xiuhua's dream is to set up a tailoring shop like her friend Yang Yan. Yang Yan is 22, and she has a young son. She had only two years of basic education. But in 1998, thanks to the livelihoods development program for girls, she set up the first tailoring shop in the village and has been able to contribute greatly to her family's income.

Does every child in your village/town/region have the opportunity to attend school? What is your school like? Does the curriculum and culture of your school support girls and their right to equal education in a safe environment? Why do you think education is particularly important for girls? Xiuhua's dream was to set up a tailoring shop, what is your DREAM?

Rate your own school: www.unicef.org/voy/explore/education/explore_1813.html



Real Life Stories—Middle East Youth and Hope for Peace

For too many girls and boys, life is filled with the violence and chaos of war. Three young people from the Middle East describe a summer interrupted by armed conflict. (UNICEF)

NEW YORK, USA, 1 August 2006 - Omer lives in Haifa, in northern Israel. She's 15 years old. "After the siren we have about a minute to get into shelters. And usually we hear booms and faraway echoes. It's kind of scary." Chloe is a 19-year-old living in Lebanon, in the capital Beirut. "It's really changed here," she says. "You see the fear in people's eyes. Shops are closed, the streets are empty...almost nobody goes to work. Everybody stays home watching the news on the television." Julie is a 16-year-old who lives in Gaza, in the occupied Palestinian territory. "We always hear the planes shelling and throwing rockets and shelling and stuff. We hear bombs going off. We hear the fighting all the time."

These three young people paint a picture through radio interviews of a fear-filled summer where they are not able to do what they usually like to do: going to the beach, getting together with friends, taking courses, traveling. They are suffering constant trauma caused by nearby explosions and violence - and asking themselves how their countries got to this point. "Everybody is depressed," says Chloe, in Beirut. "I can hear the bombs, see the black smoke. I can smell it. We are all just waiting for this nightmare to end."

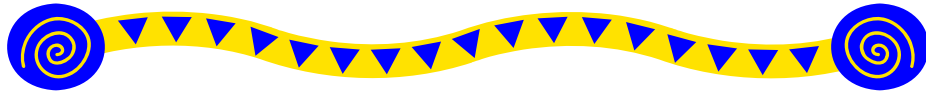
The violence that has escalated in these countries in the last few weeks has contributed to a feeling of everyday life in chaos for children and young people. They are disproportionately affected by the war-torn environment in which they live. Omer in Haifa talks about a heightened awareness when she is in a crowded place, and about watching the people around her suspiciously. "I hate that I have to have that awareness," she says. "I hate the fact that I have to have that defense mechanism."

Julie in Gaza is feeling very discouraged. "There is no future for me here," she says. "I'm always thinking about what I'm going to do when I grow up, where I'm going to go. I would like it to be a place that's safe and free and everyone's not thinking about war all the time. I just want to live in peace."

In listening to the young people in Gaza, Lebanon and northern Israel talk - about smoke-filled skies, rushing to bomb shelters and missing their chance to swim in the summer - their similarities are much more striking than their differences. The main thing they share is that they are all young people, poised on the edge of adulthood, and wondering whether theirs will be a life of fear and danger...or a life of peace.

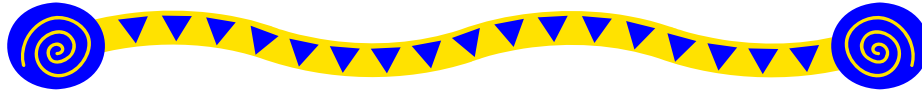
"I keep thinking about 16-year-old girls in Lebanon and what they are doing, and if they are thinking about 16-year-old girls in Israel," says Omer in Haifa. "Now, when we think about Lebanon, all we think of is Hezbollah, not about all the regular people who live there." She and the other young people in the region help remind us all that behind the politics and the armed conflict, there are regular children and adolescents, just trying to grow up in peace, hoping for a better future.

Where is the hope for a better future? How can you bring peace to your community? How can the nations of the world bring peace to all?



"Children are the change-makers."

Sanjog Thakuri, 16, from Nepal, speaking at the Children's Forum, May 2002

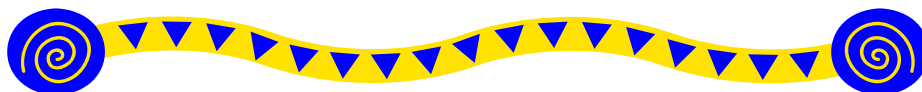


Some Internet Hotspots—Learn More

Explore the needs and concerns of the **Girl Child**. Check out some of these internet sites and learn more about the life of the **Girl Child** around the world.



- The Girl Child Quiz:** www.unicef.org/voy/explore/rights/711_girlchildquizen.php
Voices of Young People—Girls About Girls: www.unicef.org/voy/takeaction/takeaction_3131.html
More Stories: www.unicef.org/voy/explore/cse/explore_1294.html
Brain Teasers: www.unicef.org/voy/explore/cse/explore_1515.html
Photo Essay—Rights of the Child: www.unicef.org/photoessays/30048.html and <http://www.unicef.org/photoessays/30556.html>
Photo Essay—Stopping the Violence: <http://www.unviolencestudy.org/>
The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative: www.ungei.org
Child Protection: www.unicef.org/protection/index.html
Gender Equality: www.unicef.org/gender/index.html
Basic Education and Gender Equality: www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index.php
Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw
The Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/index.html
The Fourth World Conference on Women: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/index.html
The Convention on the Rights of the Child: www.unicef.org/crc
UN Special Session on Children: www.unicef.org/specialsession
Millennium Development Goals: www.un.org/millenniumgoals and www.unicef.org/mdg/index.html

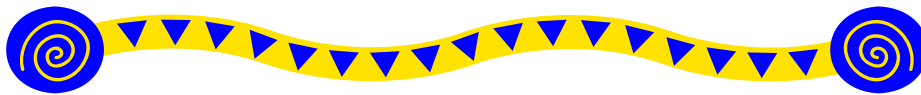


The Beijing Platform for Action: Outlines Girls' Rights

At the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, a remarkable partnership between UN Delegates and NGOs resulted in the inclusion of girls in [The Beijing Declaration](#) and in the addition of [Section L, "The Girl Child,"](#) to the [Platform for Action](#). The Beijing Platform for Action is especially critical in the fight for equality and Section L is the most comprehensive statement of girls' rights in any international document to date.

In the document, governments call attention to the need to overcome the gender stereotypes that exist in many societies in order to allow girls to develop their full potential. While women and girls have made remarkable gains in the last ten years, further progress requires that we examine both the law and traditional attitudes that continue to support: gender-based discrimination and violence; trafficking and prostitution; victimization of females in conflict situations; political powerlessness; poverty; and lack of access to education for girls.

Learn more about the Fourth World Conference on Women at:
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/index.html>



A World Fit for Children: 10 Principles for Children

The United Nations General Assembly's [Special Session on Children](#), held in New York 8-10 May 2002, was the first such session devoted entirely to children and young people. The resulting plan, called [A World Fit for Children](#), lays down 10 essential principles for creating a world in which all your rights are respected.

The 10 Principles for a World Fit for Children

- Leave No Child Out
- Put Children First
- Care for Every Child
- Fight HIV/AIDS
- Stop Harming and Exploiting Children
- Listen to Children
- Educate Every Child
- Protect Children from War
- Protect the Earth for Children
- Fight Poverty: Invest in Children



UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children

The Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, is a global effort to paint a detailed picture of the causes and effects of violence against children, and to propose clear recommendations for action to prevent it. The study focuses on the nature and extent of violence against children in five settings: the home and family; schools and educational settings; other institutional settings (orphanages, jails); in the workplace and the community; and on the streets.

"This is a landmark study," said Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). "It tells us that violence against children happens in every country and cuts across social, cultural, religious, and ethnic lines." She said that violence committed by teachers and bullies kept many children, especially girls, away from school. Sexual violence spread HIV/AIDS, and some 100-140 million women and girls had experienced genital cutting. For more information, please visit www.unviolencestudy.org.

The Working Group on Girls

The [Working Group on Girls](#) (WGG) of [the NGO Committee on UNICEF](#) and its International Network for Girls (INfG) is a coalition of NGOs committed to promoting the rights of girls in all areas and stages of their lives and assisting girls to develop their full potential.

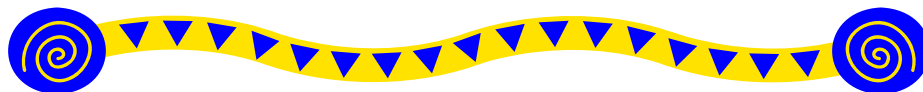
The activities of the WGG and the INfG support the following aims:

- Ensure that national governments implement, through policy statements, legislation, program development, and resource allocation the commitments to girls' rights made through international declarations and conventions;
- Advocate for the ongoing inclusion and development of girls' rights in the work of the United Nation systems and structures and in international agreements;
- Promote the active participation of girls as agents of change in their own lives, families, communities and societies.



You can find the *WGG Platform for Girls* at http://www.girlsrights.org/girls.php#fact_sheets. Learn more about the Working Group for Girls at www.girlsrights.org. Additional information about the NGO Committee on UNICEF is available at its website, <http://www.ngocomunicef.org/>.

We strive for "the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child."



Special thanks to UNICEF for the use of their stories and to Girls Learn International, INC for their photos.