



PRESS STATEMENT:

CHILDREN DEMAND RIGHT TO FULL ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY

Brussels, 13 November 2014 – Today a Children’s Declaration of Rights has been presented to the Joint Council on Youth (JCY), which is gathered for its annual meeting at the Council of Europe. Membership of the JCY comprises the European Steering Committee for Youth (CEDJ) and the Advisory Council on Youth. The JCY now intends to share the Children’s Declaration with the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers – the highest body of this organisation – and with the Committee of Experts on the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016-2019.

The child authors of the Declaration met this summer 2014 whilst participating in the Children as Actors for Transforming Society (CATS) conference in Caux, Switzerland. CATS is a unique space where children, young people and adults work together in mutual respect towards a more just, inclusive and sustainable society, where all can realise their fundamental human rights and potential.

The child participants wanted to ensure that their participation in CATS had a tangible outcome and so wrote the Declaration which reflects their desire to see a world in which children’s rights to protection, expression and participation are upheld.

Their Declaration states, *“that the authorities and society in general recognise the ‘right to full active participation.’ This means that we [children] are social actors, regardless of age, gender, religion or socio-economic level. That is why we demand that the law must reflect the reality of our countries and our opinions not only be heard but taken into account.”*

In line with the philosophy of the conference, adult participants in CATS supported this important initiative. These adults included representatives of Eurochild (members of the CATS Advisory Committee), along with the three organising partners. André-Jacques Dodin, Head of Youth Policy Division, Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation at the Council of Europe, who actually took part in CATS, gave the commitment to bring the Children’s Declaration to the Committee of Ministers.

Mr Dodin declared: *“[Children and young people’s participation] makes sense on so many levels, leading to better decision making, promoting active citizenship among children and young people and deepening our democracies. [...] Too often the apathy or immaturity of children and young people is cited for lack of action by authorities and institutions, when the real obstacles are often the lack of understanding or capacity within institutions to engage with children and young people.”*

Jonathan Levy, Director of CATS, declared: *“The Children’s Declaration is a concrete example of the meaningful initiatives children take when they have the means and access to the support they need. They worked diligently to craft a text that all of the children and young people could sign up to, expressing their views on the issues they are concerned about and the changes they would like to see in the world.”*

As next year's edition of CATS is under preparation, Mr Levy concluded: *"This is a significant achievement in only the second year of the conference. It powerfully illustrates what children and young people are capable of and demonstrates why they should be recognised as competent partners in society."*

On behalf of the co-organisers of CATS:

Child to Child – Initiatives of Change – Universal Education Foundation



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Children's Declaration:

In exercising the law that assists us, children and adolescents, we wish to express our thoughts in this World CATS Conference of more than 41 countries from the continents of Africa, America, Europe, Asia and Oceania.

We mean that CATS is a space to contribute to the implementation and exercise of all rights recognised and not recognised by all children of the world.

That is why Girls, Boys, and Teens together wish to express the following:

1. That the authorities and society in general recognise the "right to full active participation." This means that we are social actors, regardless of age, gender, religion or socio-economic level. That is why we demand that the law must reflect the reality of our countries and our opinions not only be heard but taken into account.
2. Children and teenagers, we join the struggle for liberty, dignity and peace. We don't want any walls but bridges of solidarity, peace and hope.
3. We joined the Hate Speech campaign to reject all forms of violation of human rights against children and teenagers that are expressed in rules, international conventions, media, or not in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC recognises the right to protection from all forms of violence and exploitation (Art. 23), and the major Hate Speech campaign invites us to denounce and combat all forms of verbal violence. Examples are children in street situations, children and adolescents workers, children and adolescents with disabilities, children in conflict with the law or in detention, indigenous children and children from impoverished communities who are socially, politically and economically discriminated against. It is urgent to build an ethics of internet use in all types of media and politics.
4. We also want to express our outrage at the blind eye turned towards indigenous children in our countries who still face social, economic, and political discrimination. In many of our countries, our governments' allocated resources are minimal for our right to health and quality education.

5. Likewise we denounce the situation of terror, violence and exclusion that many children live in, in some of our countries, who are also kidnapped, beheaded, tortured and treated as disposable objects.
6. 25 years after the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we want every program and policy to develop participatory teaching strategies that allow healing and build a world of solidarity, peace, justice and equality.
7. We want to shout to the world that bits of our dreams have been gathered here to put together a big puzzle of hope, to live with intergenerational dialogue. So we want zero violence for our people and societies from the beginning of their lives.
8. 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 the democratic space that influences our life because "We are Citizens Today."

Let us be guardians of joy, peace, love and all our rights.