What is a General Comment?

A General Comment is a document produced by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to help governments understand what they need to do in order to make the rights of children real. They have produced 17 so far - on issues like violence, participation, health, early years, children with disabilities, and play. All General Comments are about 15-20 pages long.

The Committee has now decided to write a General Comment on the rights of adolescents - children aged between 10-18 years. The reason for this is that adolescents are often ignored by governments until they do something ‘wrong’! So governments get concerned about young people breaking the law, taking drugs, having sex, getting drunk, being violent or failing at school. But they are less concerned to make sure young people can participate in things that matter to them, have decent sports and recreation facilities, have access to good sexual and reproductive health services, are not discriminated against and so on.

This General Comment will set out why governments need to take adolescents more seriously, and lists ALL the things that governments need to do to make sure that ALL young people's rights are respected.
How will the General Comment get written?

Every General Comment is produced slightly differently. With this one, the process has been like this:

» A draft outline was written by a consultant
» The Committee reviewed it and made some comments
» A revised draft was posted on the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights with a request for submissions
» 70 submissions were sent in and consultations with young people reviewed
» A first draft was written
» A group of experts from all over the world meet to review the draft
» Young people at CATS-Children as Actors for Transforming Society reviewed the draft and made recommendations
» A second draft is produced for the Committee to review and accept

Once it is written, it is published and translated into 6 languages—English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Arabic. All governments are then expected to take it into account in their laws, policies and how they allocate money and resources.

What does the draft General Comment say?

The General Comment covers:

• The aims of the General Comment
• Why it is important to focus on adolescents
• A principled approach to respecting rights of adolescents, including the principles of participation, non-discrimination, and best interests of adolescents.
• Young people who are discriminated against
• What governments must do to make sure young people’s rights are respected
  › General measures like budgets, training and money
  › Measures to respect young people’s rights - e.g. rights to information,
  › Measures to protect young people’s rights - e.g. from violence or exploitation
  › Measures to provide for young people - e.g. health care and education

How can you get involved?

You have a chance to influence what the General Comment says by answering a questionnaire developed by young people at CATS.

Click here to access the questionnaire: http://bit.ly/1PJqBtq

The idea is to gather as many views as possible from children and young people from around the world, so don’t be shy in writing comments. And we very much want as many of you as possible to take part, in order to make sure that the General Comment really addresses your concerns, your hopes, and your futures.