Children’s Rights and the Environment

Report of the United Nations
Special Rapporteur

What is the United Nations?
The United Nations – UN – is made up of 193 countries from across the world. Its role is to support these countries to keep their human rights promises.

Who is the Special Rapporteur?
Special Rapporteurs – SRs – are experts who advise governments and others on human rights. The SR on Human Rights and the Environment is John H. Knox.

What are children’s rights?
Children’s rights are the promises that the world’s governments have made to children. Children have a special set of rights in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – UNCRC.

Why is the SR writing about children’s rights & the environment?
Children are more at risk from environmental problems than adults but their views and interests are often left out of decisions.

Who is this report for?
The SR thought it was important to provide people with advice on this topic.

He wants it to be used by governments, children, parents, businesses and others.
WHAT EFFECTS DO ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS HAVE ON CHILDREN?

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES:

**AIR POLLUTION**
Children breathe more quickly, are more likely to get chest infections and find it harder to recover.

**WATER POLLUTION**
At least 1 in every 4 people around the world drinks water that is unsafe.

This can cause blindness and other diseases.

**CLIMATE CHANGE**
When more and heavier floods happen children may have to leave their homes.

They might be split up from their families and this puts them in danger.

**CHEMICALS AND WASTE**
Children in some countries recycle old mobile phones without having the proper safety equipment.

This can expose them to harmful chemicals.

**ECOSYSTEMS OUT OF BALANCE**
A good natural environment exposes children to different things.

Children need to be exposed to lots of different germs to be healthy (e.g. to avoid allergies).
WHICH CHILDREN’S RIGHTS ARE AFFECTED?

**RIGHT TO LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT**

- Every child has the right to life and development - Article 6, UNCRC.
- 1.5 million deaths of children under the age of 5 could be stopped by reducing environmental health risks.

**RIGHT TO HEALTH**

- Every child has the right to good quality healthcare and a clean environment - Article 24, UNCRC.
- Not being able to wash their hands with clean water can increase children's chances of getting diseases such as stomach bugs.

**RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING**

- All children have the right to a decent standard of living, including food, housing, water - Article 27, UNCRC.
- When there is not enough food and clean water children can become hungry and sick.

**RIGHT TO PLAY AND RECREATION**

- All children have the right to relax and play, and to join a wide range of activities - Article 31, UNCRC.
- Many children are in danger when they play, because of polluted water and open dumps.
**What are governments required to do?**

**Education**
Children should be able to learn by being outside in nature, taking part in projects about the issues affecting the environment locally and across the world.

Children should learn to respect the natural environment – Article 29, UNCRC.

**Information**
Information on the environment should be made available to children in ways that they can understand.

Children have a right to seek and receive information – Article 13, UNCRC.

**Respect for children's views**
Governments should speak to children and take their experiences and ideas into account when making decisions on the environment.

Governments must seek the views of children on matters affecting them and take them seriously – Article 12, UNCRC.

**Complaints and remedies**
Complaints should be dealt with quickly and fairly and children should be able to get a response and solution (e.g., an order to stop someone who is causing environmental harm).

**Treat all children equally**
Governments should make sure that children enjoy their rights equally. Some children face extra challenges (e.g., girls from a lack of clean water and some children with disabilities at times of natural disaster).

Children's rights apply to all children whatever their sex, race, religion or abilities – Article 2, UNCRC.
WHAT OTHER THINGS SHOULD GOVERNMENTS AND OTHERS DO?

MAKE LAWS
The best interests of children should be one of the most important considerations when governments are making laws that may affect the environment.

Environmental protection agencies should make sure that everyone is obeying the rules that protect children.

WORK TOGETHER
Governments should work with each other to make sure that children’s rights are protected across the world.

Sometimes poisonous waste from one country is dumped in another country and children are harmed as a result.

CHECK ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
Governments should take into account research that shows how the environment is affecting children. They should also ask children for their opinions on their plans.

ACT RESPONSIBLY
Businesses should check the impact of their activities. They should follow the UN’s advice to businesses on protecting children’s rights.

When companies take coal out of the earth or use water from rivers, this can affect local children’s lives.

THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE
Decisions about environmental problems should consider the rights of children who are constantly arriving on this planet.

Some countries have laws that say the government and others must protect the environment for future children.
**WHAT CAN CHILDREN DO?**

**GET INFORMED**

You could...

Get books on the environment, check the internet.

**SPREAD THE WORD**

You could...

Speak about it at your school, share on social media.

**TAKE THE LEAD**

You could...

Reduce, reuse, recycle; walk or cycle instead of using a car.

**CAMPAIGN**

You could...

Join an environmental group in your school or community or raise issues in a youth parliament.

**MAKE A COMPLAINT**

You could...

Contact your local authority or speak to a responsible adult about taking legal action.
**Pollution**
When something harmful is brought into the environment.

**Ecosystem**
This includes all living things like plants and animals in a certain area. All of these rely on each other as well as non-living things like air and water.

**Climate Change**
Humans have warmed up the climate by burning fossil fuels which put too many gases that trap heat into the sky.

**Human Rights**
These are the rights all humans have to make sure that everyone is treated equally and with respect. The UN has helped countries to make lots of human rights agreements.

**UNCRC**
The UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – is a list of rights that all children have. These are strong promises made by governments to make sure that children lead a good life.
This child-friendly version of the Special Rapporteur's report was written and designed by Andy, Catriona, Ellen, Fiona, Gabriel, Hannah, Katie, Megan, Noyal, Orlaith, Pearce, Pearse, Roma and Shivani (students at Rathmore Grammar School, Belfast, Northern Ireland).

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