
Day of General Discussion on Children's Rights and the Environment

Opening statement

by children of the International Youth Network of terre des hommes

NB for Interpreters: The children will be speaking in their native languages. The statements by Ritu from India will be held in Hindi. Therefore, we provide the English translation of her speech (in *italics*) to be read out in English and as a reference for interpretation in other languages.

[1. Statement by Ignacio Packer, Secretary General of the Terre des Hommes International Federation]

2. Statement by Gina Marcela Parra Chiquillo from Colombia

Buenos días,

mi nombre es Gina Marcela Parra Chiquillo, tengo 16 años y vengo de la vereda El Hatillo, César, en Colombia.

Mi comunidad está rodeada de 5 minas de carbón a cielo abierto, cultivos de palma y dos fábricas de aceite que quedan a pocos metros de nuestro pueblo, por eso tenemos el aire y el agua muy contaminados.

Han desviado y ensuciado nuestro río, han matado nuestra tierra y alimentos y han enfermado toda vida existente en nuestra población. Esta situación nos ha llevado a un proceso de reasentamiento que ha sido muy lento y problemático porque las empresas no quieren respetar nuestros derechos.

Estoy muy contenta de estar en Ginebra porque aquí hay aire limpio y agua sana; yo aquí puedo respirar bien y beber agua de la llave. En mi comunidad el agua está contaminada y muchas veces tenemos que aguantar sed. Nuestro aire es negro por el polvillo del carbón y no hay comida.

Vengo a representar a los niños de mi comunidad para que ustedes escuchen nuestra voz y seamos tenidos en cuenta como sujetos de derechos en un mundo donde los niños y las niñas cada día somos más y más.

Gracias.

3. Statement by Ritu from India

[Spoken in Hindi:]

Namaste.

I am Ritu and I am 15 years old. I have come from Delhi, India. I live in Khichripur Colony.

Air and our life has a direct relationship. If there is no air, we are not there. If the air is clean, our health is good. If the air is bad, our health is bad.

Today the city of Delhi is expanding every day, but our spaces to breathe are contracting.

The air around us is full of toxics such as dust, smoke, chemicals, and fibers. These toxics enter our bodies with each breath. We continue to breathe them when we are at home, when we go to school, when we study, when we play, or travel in the city. This means toxic air has become an inseparable part of our everyday lives.

This toxic air affects our lives. We often fall sick. At young age, we develop serious diseases like asthma and tuberculosis. As a result, our studies suffer. We find it difficult to concentrate. We miss school and sometimes are forced to leave school. We take a lot of risk when we play. We are often injured while we play.

We want to breathe – not with walls, but with trees. Clean air and healthy environment is essential to the well-being of us children.

We say: Environment for today – and for a long tomorrow.

Thank you.

4. Statement by Caleb Mulenga from Zambia

Good morning ladies and gentlemen and children here present.

My name is Caleb Mulenga. I am 15 years old and I come from an old mining town called Kabwe in the central part of Zambia. I am a member of an ecological club at my school which is called mine secondary school.

I moved to live in Kabwe from another mining town called Chingola when I was five years old. All my short life of 15 years has been spent living in polluted mining environments.

My home and my school are all part of the old mine environment. I sleep, I go to school, I play within the mine surrounding.

Kabwe is said to be one of the most lead polluted towns in the world. This has negatively affected the main elements that ensure our well-being. The water, the air and the soil have been polluted due to over 100 years of mining. Lead pollution is the only legacy that remains after the closure of the mine. I need clean air to breathe, I need clean water to drink, and I need health food to eat. Lead permanently stays in my body and I cannot wash it away in a shower.

Ladies and gentlemen, I stand here in front of you today as a testimony of one of the many millions of children throughout the world whose lives are at risk because of continued pollution of the water, the air and the land in which they live.

I was told many times by my teachers that lead affects the nervous system, the brain, memory and causes disability and ultimately death. After spending 15 years as a child in a lead contaminated environment I am scared that one day a doctor will tell me that I have been affected because of my continued living in this highly lead contaminated environment.

It is not going to be too late, ladies and gentleman. I am sure you all have children and you want the best for them. May you please make a commitment to do the best for me and many other children living in lead polluted environments.

If it is too late for me, then please do something at least for my younger brothers and sisters and perhaps for my children. Because we need the right to a clean and healthy environment.

I thank you.

[\[5. Video by the International Youth Network of terre des hommes on children's rights and the environment\]](#)

[\[Introduced by Caleb Mulenga\]](#)

6. Concluding statements by the children

- 🕒 In our statements and the video, it became clear that environmental child rights are life rights.
- 🕒 Without a clean and healthy environment, we cannot learn, play and live. If we neglect our environment, we threaten our lives.
- 🕒 Nosotros los niños y jóvenes de algunos continentes del mundo como África, Asia y Latinoamérica sufrimos la contaminación del aire y del agua y vemos sus efectos en nuestro cuerpo y territorio. Por eso enfermamos y morimos: Niños, niñas, jóvenes, mujeres, hombres y territorios del mundo devastados.
- 🕒 Simplemente no lo entendemos: ¿por qué los adultos nos dicen que el medio ambiente es tan valioso y luego lo tratan tan mal? Cuidan otras cosas como el dinero o sus pertenencias pero parece que no les preocupa destruir la naturaleza. Pronto todos aquellos que se aprovechan de la explotación de la naturaleza se verán afectados. ¡No lo entendemos!

[Spoken in Hindi:]

- 🕒 *Nobody questions children's rights to education, to be protected from violence and exploitation, to health and nutrition. Because these are important parts of our lives. A clean and healthy environment is so profound for children to live. We need environmental child rights because they are life rights.*
- 🕒 *We as all children of this world have great hope that you can help us – in our local communities, as governments of our countries, and as the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. We trust and believe that you will support us and guarantee our rights to a healthy environment – today, during the Day of General Discussion, and beyond. Thank you.*