

CHILDREN'S MEETING PLACE

with Children's Declaration, Conclusions and Recommendations



Inauguration of The Children's Meeting Place September 19th – 20th, 2001 at the United Nations, Nairobi, Kenya.

The Children's Declaration is the result of the inauguration ceremony of The Children's Meeting Place that took place at the United Nations, Nairobi, Kenya 19th -20th of September 2001. It was planned to be in conjunction with the United Nations Special Session on Children (UNGASS). The terror attacks in New York closed the United Nations for some time and the UNGASS meeting was postponed. The children and adults who participated in the inauguration of the Children's Meeting Place shared a strong determination to unite over boundaries and celebrate Life and Light.

The Children's Meeting Place is a Tree

The Children's Meeting Place is a Tree - Acacia Xanthopholea of the Mimosaceae family, known in English as the Fever Tree and in Kiswahili Mgunga. 250 children joined one another among the branches and around their Tree. They wrote and drew their wishes and messages for their new Meeting Place, danced, read poems, played music, sang songs and played together. The children came from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Finland and Sweden. All the children brought a cup of water and a handful of earth to honour their Meeting Place and they brought their visions, ideas, hopes, dreams and concerns for our common future.

United Nations Secretary General Kofi A. Annan sent a long and warm message to the children, who ended with the words: "The United Nations eagerly looks forward to what you, my dear young ambassadors, will do to make your difference in this world!"

Director General, UNON and Executive Director UNEP Dr. Klaus Töpfer welcomed the children to their Tree. "It's really a pleasure for United Nations to make this gift to you children. This is your tree! Use it! I am so glad you are here and take ownership of this tree and I thank you for your water and the soil I hold in my hands. Maybe you allow me from time to time to come to your tree and play with you!" Dr. Töpfer also thanked Globetree for the initiative and gave his best wishes for the future.

Deputy Exec. Dir. of Habitat, Mr. Daniel Biau, welcomed the children and conveyed the cordial greetings of Ms Anna Tibaijuka, (the Executive Director of Habitat). Mr Biau recalled the days in February this year when children created a Future Vessel at the 18th Session of the Commission on Human Settlements. "We all greatly welcome this Children's Meeting Place. This is a place for you children to be run by you children".

Chief Programme Communication and Participation Ms Denise Shepherd-Johnson, Unicef, invited the children to join the Global Movement for Children.

Swedish Ambassador Ms Inga Björk-Klevby thanked the children for their important work for a better future. Ms Ambassador read some of the many messages which were sent to the children from all over the world:

HM Queen Silvia of Sweden, Prime Minister of Sweden Hon. Göran Persson, Swedish Ambassador to the USA Mr. Jan Eliasson, EU-Commissioner for the Environment Margot Wallström, Swedish Minister for the Environment Hon. Kjell Larsson, The Governor of Alandia/Finland Peter Lindbäck and Astronaut Loren Acton.

President of the Globetree, Kajsa Dahlström closed the Inauguration Ceremony and thanked everyone for their support to The Children's Meeting Place. Special thanks to the Director General of United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON), Klaus Töpfer for giving Globetree the honour to run The Children's Meeting Place at the United Nations in Nairobi.

Reflections

The Children's Tree has: Seeds, Roots, Trunk, Branches, Leaves and Thorns.

Children are the *Seeds* of The Tree. They come from the beautiful flowers and become new, slightly different individuals than the ones they spring from.

Adults are the *Roots*.

The Children's Tree is old and has deep roots. The wisdom and life experiences of The Roots nourish The Tree and provide stability in the ground, which is the world.

From the roots comes the civil society, which is the *Trunk*.

It is the channel for water and nourishment to the higher levels. Children invite decision-makers to their Tree to dialogue so they are reminded that their decisions will affect children.

Above the trunk come the *Branches*, which are the children's visions and ideas. They keep branching into more and more visions and are infinite, endless.

On the branches are the *Leaves*, which give life to Children's visions and ideas. They spread by the wind and when they fall, they nourish the soil and the *Roots*.

The *Thorns* remind us of the difficult task to bring the children's wishes to real life.

Thorny trees can prevail both in dry- and wetlands. When we despair let's think of the children who climbed high up in their Tree to make their messages visible. Some of the children dared for the first time in their lives to express their difficulties, pain, fears and tears.

They did not fear the Thorns - they found their way among them!

The vision

The Tree will be a place to meet in respect, love and care and to learn from one another. The space under The Tree is a sacred place, where children shall feel secure and be free to express themselves without fear. Here the children will find a new extended family that cares for them. Under The Tree we are all mums, dads and kids - and we are all equal. The Tree will give space for traditional ways of sharing wisdom and knowledge, which has been ignored or forgotten in modern society. Children will remind decision-makers that the decisions they are to make will affect the children and their future.

A Children's Wish

The Children's Tree at the United Nations will be an inspiration for Cities, Municipalities and Villages all over the world to dedicate a strong and old tree to children at a central place where children, adults and decision-makers at all levels can meet and dialogue as a sign of unity.



Director General, UNON and Executive Director UNEP Dr. Klaus Töpfer together with the children by The Tree. At the inauguration of the Children's Meeting Place.

Globetree wish to thank the United Nations in Nairobi for The Children's Meeting Place - The Beautiful Tree!

Children's Declaration

- ***We have to treat the environment better.*** Stop cutting down trees and dumping chemicals into the water – otherwise we'll have no rain and a lot of people and animals will die. We get infected by many diseases. Sometimes the air is difficult to breathe
- ***Show more respect for water.*** Water is the source of all life and we need free supply of freshwater. People pollute the water; we use it and get sick.
- ***All children need*** clothes, food, a house to live in, medicine and education.
- ***Find a way for AIDS to be treated!*** Mothers die and fathers die and we end up alone on the streets.
- ***The family is very important.*** We want our parents to love and take care of each other and of us children. We want them to spend time with us and not to drink so much alcohol because then they get violent towards us. We want them to listen to us because we can help them to solve a lot of problems
- ***Give the street kids food, education and families to live with.*** Because then they can help other street kids. Some young girls deny their children, because when they get pregnant their parents throw them out of the house. Orphans should be treated well and cared for by society.
- ***All kind of exploitation of children is wrong.*** There should be no child labour in mines and farming for big profit, like cash crops. We should not have to feel frightened when we walk in the streets or when we play outside with friends. We do not want to fear to be kidnapped or raped.
- ***Every child should have the right to education.*** Both boys and girls. It's very important that the education is free so the families can send both girls and boys to school. Otherwise many girls are forced to stay home and marry very early. We don't want too much homework as we also have to do a lot of work in our families after school and earn money for school fees. We don't want the teachers to punish us so hard when we say or do something wrong. We also want the teachers to respect and listen to us. Some of us fear wild animals when we go to school - please help us get safely to school.
- ***Every human being should be equal.*** Girls and boys, black and white, children and adults. All shall be able to speak up! Girls too!
- ***Children with disabilities should also be respected and not looked at as something that is not good for anybody.***
- ***We do not want girls to be sold for marriages.***
- ***Communities should stop circumcision of young girls.***
- ***Stop all violence!*** We are afraid of the war – we don't want to hurt each other.
- ***Children who are not poor and have a good environment have a responsibility to learn and understand the situation of poor children.***
- ***We shall get help to meet and learn from one another over the globe so we can see what is good and bad in different living environments.***
- ***It's a difference when adults listen to us children and when adults respect our opinions!***
- ***Children and adults all over the world: Let us join and help each other to create a world in peace and love.***
- ***Involve us children in all decisions that concern us and respect our opinions!***
- ***Give all children all over the world a Children's Meeting Place!***

Conclusions

After listening to the children Globetree concludes:

- There is a need for children to meet and learn from one another.
- Children want adults to listen to them and respect their opinions.
- Many children live with experiences, which they have difficulties to share with anyone.
- Adults who joined the event were deeply touched and also impressed by the children's messages, their wisdom and determination to find ways for a better future. "How can we support this spirit?"
- By listening to children we will achieve sustainable democracy also including the small citizens not yet being able to vote.

Recommendations

- **A Special Children's Pass to the United Nations.** Children are welcome to join under The Tree at the United Nations. It's important to find an easy way for children and accompanying adults to enter the UN. Maybe a special Children's Pass can be issued or a way to make the entry easy.
- **Dialogue between children and decision makers.** The children bring their wishes, hopes and dreams for a better future. The decisions are with the decision makers. It is important to make preparations for regular meetings between children and decision makers. One suggestion is that a meeting with children under their Tree is part in the official agenda when important meetings take place at the United Nations. The delegates of the United Nations can have an hour together with the children around their Tree - an extended coffee break - when they inform the children of the discussions going on in Assembly Hall and the workshops. In this hour the delegates shall take proper time to listen and respect the children's opinions before they make their final statements.
- **Non formal meetings.** A meeting and dialogue under The Children's Tree shall be non formal. The delegates shall make all efforts to explain the official agenda so that children understand what it's all about.
- **Family gathering.** All meetings under The Tree shall follow the idea that we are all moms, dads and children - one family - in order to make it easy for children to address or rather dialogue together with the delegates. Delegates need to come down to the children's level and make them feel welcome to join!
- **Under The Tree there is a win-win.** The children get to know the problems that are discussed today on the highest level and are invited to share their opinions and give their recommendations to matters that will affect them in the future. The official delegates, working on agendas for the future, will get the opportunity to meet and learn from the ones who will live with the decisions they make.
- **Inspiration when problems arise.** When during international meetings, the delegates experience difficult problems; they shall be invited to move from the conference rooms and gather under The Tree, meditate and get inspiration to solve problems - for the world's children and the future.
- **Info accessible for children.** The meeting under The Children's Tree will bring laughter, joy and new insights to both children and adults-which will inspire the official documents. It's important to make official agendas and documents accessible for children to read.
- **Children's Meeting Places over the world.**
The children participating in the inauguration ceremony of The Children's Meeting Place went home with the determination to have their own Children's Meeting Place back home. Officials attending conferences at the United Nations will be both informed and inspired to present the idea of a Children's Meeting Place to their local and state governments.
- **It's important to unite what is good of the past to become part of the future!**
Secr, Gen. Kofi A. Annan says in his message to The Children's Meeting Place: "In African village life, a tree can also have great spiritual meaning and serve as a place where people gather to discuss issues of common concern".
- **Globetree urge people of the world to find their way back to The Tree!**
The world needs innovative solutions to the problems stated in the UN Declaration of The Rights of the Child and Agenda 21. The Children's Meeting Place supports bridges over the boundaries of age, gender, professions, nations and culture. Come, be a part of it!