



**Montessori Model United Nations (MMUN 2010)
Committee on the Rights of the Child
Background Guide**

Dear Delegates,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the 2010 Montessori Model UN and especially to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The following pages intend to guide you in the research of the topics that we will be debating at MMUN 2010. Please note that this guide will only provide the basis for your investigation. It is your responsibility to find as much information that you can on the topic and how it relates to the country that you represent. The more information that you have and learn about, the more you will take from debate and the whole MMUN experience.

We encourage you to learn all that you can about what your country is doing in regard to the selected topics.

Enjoy and see you in New York!

Montessori Model United Nations 2010 Secretariat

The Birth of the United Nations

The first half of the 20th century is remembered as a period of change and turmoil. After the First World War many people believed that it was necessary to create a world organization capable of keeping peace and preventing the horrors of war. The League of Nations was founded immediately, consisting of 42 countries, 58 at its largest point. Its goal was to preserve peace by solving international conflicts peacefully and promoting cooperation between nations in economic and international affairs. However, the Second World War unfolded and proved that the League had not accomplished its goal.

In 1944 representatives of China, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Russian Federation (In that moment USSR) meeting at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC, prepared a blueprint for a new and stronger international organization. Towards the end of the war, representatives of 51 countries gathered in San Francisco in 1945 to prepare the final text that would lay the foundations of international cooperation. Most of the ideals and structure of this new organization were the same as the League's.



The difference was that now, the organization had the support of the most powerful countries of the world. The UN came to exist officially when the Charter of the United Nations was supported by the five permanent members of the Security Council (the United States, the United Kingdom, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, China, and France) and a majority of all other signatories on October 24, 1945.

The purpose of the United Nations is to bring all nations of the world together to work for peace and development, based on the principles of justice, human dignity and the well being of all people. It affords the opportunity for countries to balance global interdependence and national interests while addressing international problems. Currently, 192 countries are United Nations Member States. Representatives from these nations meet in the General Assembly, which is the closest event to a world parliament. Each country, large or small, rich or poor, has a single vote.

The United Nations Today

The United Nations is an international organization committed to maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards, and human rights. Due to its unique international character, and the powers vested in its founding Charter, the Organization can take action on a wide range of issues, and provide a forum for its 192 Member States to express their views, through the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and other bodies and committees.



The work of the United Nations reaches every corner of the globe. Although best known for peacekeeping, peacebuilding, conflict prevention and humanitarian assistance, there are many other ways the United Nations and its System affect our lives and make the world a better place. The Organization also works on: sustainable development,

environment and refugees protection, disaster relief, counter terrorism, disarmament and non-proliferation, promoting democracy, human rights, governance, economic and social development and international health, clearing landmines, expanding food production, and more, in order to achieve its goals and coordinate efforts for a safer world for this and future generations.

About the Committee on the Rights of the Child



The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by UN Member States. It also monitors implementation of two optional protocols to the Convention, on involvement of children in armed conflict and on sale of children.

All States parties are obliged to submit regular reports to the Committee on how the rights are being implemented. The Committee examines each report and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the State party.



Topics for MMUN 2010:

Topic 1: Elimination of Child Labor, especially in mining and risk environments

Topic 2: Education as a Human Right for Children

Topic 1: Elimination of Child Labor, especially in mining and risk environments

Gold mining is extremely dangerous work for children. Yet still today, tens of thousands are found in gold mines of Africa, Asia and South America. Children work both above and under ground. In the tunnels and mineshafts they risk death from explosions, rock falls, and tunnel collapse. They breathe air filled with dust and sometimes toxic gases. Above ground, children dig, crush, mill, often in the hot sun. Some stand for hours in water, digging sand and then carrying bags of mud on their heads or backs to washing sites. In all mining sites, there is risk of falling down open shafts or into pits that are scattered around the areas. Like adults, children suffer the effects of noise and vibration, poor ventilation and lighting, exhaustion and overexertion. But children are particularly vulnerable to exposure to dust and chemicals because they are still growing. The result can be serious respiratory problems, constant headaches, hearing and sight problems, joint disorders and various dermatological, muscular and orthopedic wounds, jeopardizing both their mental and physical long-term health. Gold mining stands out from other forms of small-scale mining for an additional grave hazard: the mixing of mercury with the crushed ore or sediments to separate out the gold. Mercury is a highly toxic metal and is very often mishandled by small-scale miners. It can be absorbed through the skin, or through inhalation of mercury vapor. Seeping into the soil or water supply, it can contaminate food and drinking water. Prolonged exposure to mercury can lead to serious physical disorders and neurological problems.



The following descriptions of children in gold mining areas are taken from several countries. While the hazards and processes are fairly similar from country to country, the family situations, working conditions, ages and gender of children involved vary according to local traditions, the level of poverty, the regulatory environment and other schooling or employment alternatives. Some children mine alongside their families or other community members after school or during holidays. Some drop out of school to work full time. In the worst cases, children are trafficked to mine sites where they are forced to work in absolutely horrendous slavery-like conditions.

Burkina Faso and Niger

Child labor in gold mining, or *orpillage* as it is called locally, is widespread and increasing in Burkina Faso and Niger. As much as one quarter of all children in the world who work in mines are

in a region of the Sahel common to these two countries. The reason for this is partly economic, partly social. The droughts of the 1970s and 1980s set off a downward spiral of poverty which, in turn, disrupted communities and families to such an extent that children previously protected by traditional customs and structures became a resource like any other that could be used to increase income.

Estimates have shown that children under 18 may constitute up to half of the entire workforce (estimated at between 200,000 and 500,000 across the two countries). Approximately 70 per cent of the children are under the age of 15, indicating that children start working from a young age. The majority of children come from villages within the area, often within 10 km of the site, although a substantial number travel considerable distances within or even outside the country. An unknown percentage of children at the mining sites have been trafficked as well. Non-local children are particularly vulnerable to abuse and deceit by adults and tend to work full-time in the pits and for longer hours than other children whose parents are present.

Girls as well as boys undertake heavy work, although it is more likely that boys will work underground, while girls stay on the surface. Work for both involves the transport, crushing, washing and processing of rock. Typically, children under 10 years old tend to be given less arduous tasks, such as petty trading, pushing water carts and working as messengers. Regular, full-time work usually begins between the ages of 12 to 14 years. Children often work every day. Working hours are extremely variable – from 8 to 14 hours – but almost always at least 6-8 hours per day (occasionally the children sleep underground). In many cases, children have insufficient time to rest and inadequate food and water. Again, those without parents are particularly at risk, having nowhere to secure a decent meal or safe place to rest before returning to work.

Although children are often expected to do the same work as adults, they receive less pay. Most often, remuneration for children is a combination of in kind and cash payments. Others are not paid but work simply for food, shelter and security. For those that are paid, the cost of food, tools and medication may be deducted from their earnings such that they are left with nothing. Those working with their parents are seen as simply providing an extra pair of hands to share the workload and are therefore not paid directly. Underground, the children are often forced to undertake exceedingly strenuous work under very dangerous conditions. Most of the tools and equipment they use are primitive and heavy, requiring considerable strength to use and this constantly strains children's bodies.

Ghana

Small-scale mining in Ghana, referred to locally as “galamsey” (gather and sell), has been on the increase since the early 1980s. An estimated 10,000 children are involved in various parts of the country, many of them in gold mining.

Small-scale mine operators principally engage children between ages 10 and 18 years old who are paid minimal daily wages. These children perform all sorts of low-skilled tasks, including building trenches, carrying loads of gold ore on their heads to washing sites (done largely by girls), washing the ore (done largely by boys), amalgamating the gold using mercury, and selling the product.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

During the recent war in Congo, thousands of children were abducted and forced to become child soldiers. In the mineral rich eastern region of the country, many children were doubly exploited – while they weren't fighting, they were forced into hard labor in the numerous small-scale mines that supported the local militias and their sponsors. Following the withdrawal of the Ugandan and Rwandan armies in 2002-03 and the arrival of United Nations peacekeeping forces, demobilization and rehabilitation of child soldiers has moved forward in many areas of the DRC.

Mongolia

Mongolia is rich in gold deposits, and informal gold mining has become an important and growing source of income in rural areas. It has been estimated that 20 per cent of the country's rural workforce is involved either full or part time. Children, mostly boys, work with their families or with a group from their village. The average age of these mining children is 14 years old. However, below the age of 13, there are actually more girls than boys at mine sites. Children's contributions to family incomes are often vital; in many cases, they are actually providing the main source of income to the household.

Many children at Mongolian mines do not go to school; others go to school on weekdays and work during weekends and holidays. The most frequent problems are hunger, fatigue, illness, and injuries due to accidents. In addition to being exposed to mercury, children face various other health problems. These include physical exhaustion, respiratory, kidney and urinary tract diseases, and joint and back pain. Settlements near mining sites tend to be overcrowded and unhygienic; and have no access to emergency and health services.

Latin America: Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru

Child labor is prevalent in small-scale gold mining in Latin America. This is mainly because there are so many families or entire communities that earn their livelihood from this dangerous work. There may be as many as 65,000 children participating in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru alone. Since the 1990s a significant expansion of small-scale mining has occurred, not only in countries where mining has traditionally played an important role in the economy, such as Bolivia and Peru, but also in other countries where mining is of less importance, such as Ecuador.

Mining communities in the Andean region are usually located far from any important town. They are particularly isolated during the rainy season (January to March), as roads, which in many cases are unpaved, become treacherous. These isolated settlements lack basic services such as decent housing, water, electricity, and medical services or schooling facilities for the children.

Working conditions are very poor, as production systems are generally obsolete and inadequate. Work days can last up to 10 hours. The work done by children varies according to the type of mine from which ore is being extracted (underground, rivers or surface deposits). Many children (generally adolescents) work with their parents in such activities as extraction, hauling ore, crushing and grinding the ore, and mercury amalgamation.

Consider the following questions when writing your position paper:

1. Is there mining in your country? Are children working in these mines?
2. Is your country a consumer of gold and diamonds? How does your country ensure that these products come from mines without working children?
3. How can countries protect children from working in dangerous conditions?

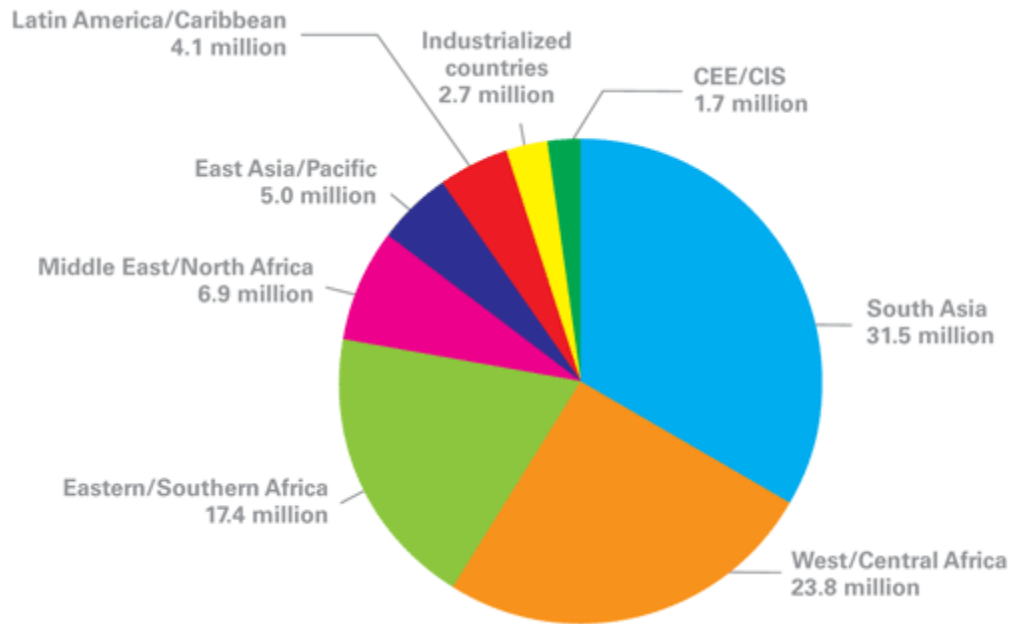
Topic 2: Education as a Human Right for Children

Children's rights cover every aspect of the lives of children and adolescents and can be broken down into these main categories:

- Survival rights: the right to life and to have the most basic needs met like adequate standard of living, shelter, nutrition, medical treatment.
- Development rights: the rights enabling children to reach their fullest potential: **education**, play and leisure, cultural activities, access to information and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- Participation rights: rights that allow children and adolescents to take an active role in their communities: the freedom to express opinions; to have a say in matters affecting their own lives; to join associations.
- Protection rights: rights that are essential for safeguarding children and adolescents from all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation: special care for refugee children; protection against armed conflict, child labor.

Education allows children to expand their minds and reach their potential. However millions of children and especially girls are still denied a basic education. While the gender gap in primary school attendance is shrinking globally, in many parts of the world is still wide. The barriers keeping girls out of school in the developing world not only rob them of future opportunity, but impact their very health and survival. Education is about more than just learning. In many countries it's a life-saver. A girl out of school is more likely to fall prey to HIV/AIDS and less able to raise a healthy family.

Gender parity is a prerequisite if the world is to achieve universal primary education by 2015, the target date set by the UN for the Millennium Development Goals. The shrinking gender gap has helped reduce the total number of children denied a primary education. According to projections, fewer than 100 million children may be out of primary school by 2005, down from an estimated 115 million in 2001. Whatever the exact figure, it is clear that far too many are still shut out of the classroom, and at the present rate of increased school attendance, the goal of universal primary education by 2015 won't be met.



Number of Children in Primary School Age that are not in school. By Region, 2006, UNICEF.

A fundamental barrier to increased access to education is poverty. Children from the poorest 20 per cent of households in the developing world are on average three times less likely to go to primary school than those from the wealthiest 20 per cent. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS, civil conflict, child labor, and natural disasters all have a clear impact on access to schools and all tend to affect countries with already weak educational systems.

Making universal primary education and gender parity in schools a reality will require some radical shifts in thinking and policies. **All countries must begin to view education as a fundamental human right**, not as an optional privilege where budgets allow. Kenya's decision to abolish school fees for primary schools, following in the footsteps of Tanzania and Uganda, is just such a dramatic shift in thinking.

However, opening the school gate to all who wish to enter has put a massive strain on already over-burdened resources. That's why international aid for education must be drastically increased. The UN estimates that an extra USD 5.6 billion per year will be required to achieve universal primary education -- no small sum. Some richer nations have already recognized the importance of this challenge. The UK government has pledged \$2.68 billion over the next three years to help get more girls in school. Norway contributed \$51 million to UNICEF supported education initiatives in 2003- 2004. The goal of universal primary education with equal opportunity for girls and boys is realistic. It is affordable, it is achievable and what's more, **it's our children's birthright**.

Consider the following questions when writing your position paper:

1. What is the children population of your country? How many go to school?
2. Does your country have a significant problem with children out of school?
3. What initiatives has your country designed to address education for all children?

Important Links:

Committee on the Rights of the Child

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/>

Convention on the Rights of the Child

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

Progress for Children: A Report Card on Child Protection

[http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Progress_for_Children-No.8_EN_081309\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Progress_for_Children-No.8_EN_081309(1).pdf)

Progress for Children: A World Fit for Children

http://www.unicef.org/progressforchildren/2007n6/index_41401.htm

UN Cyberschool Bus – Human Rights

<http://www0.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humanrights/index.asp>

Vocabulary

<http://www0.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humanrights/resources/vocabulary.asp>