

Award Ceremony of the Student-led project competition on “Impact of Climate Change on Children’s Rights” organised by Office of Ombudsperson for Children on Wednesday 22 November 2023 at 09:45 at Domaine de St. Aubin

Mrs. Rita Venkatasawmy, Ombudsperson for Children

Dear students and teachers

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning

This Project Competition on “**Impact of Climate Change of Children’s Rights**” shows the interest of the Ombudsperson for Children in raising children’s awareness of the dangers of the climate crisis.

As a matter of fact, last week I attended the closing ceremony of a two-day workshop on “Climate Crisis” organised by this same department.

You may be aware that this event also coincides with the celebration of the United Nations Universal Children’s Day to spread awareness among children worldwide, and to improve their welfare.

Climate change represents one of the biggest societal challenges that humanity faces today, with a huge impact on the future life of planet Earth.

Children represent almost one-third of the world’s population. They have the right to live in a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. They should be able to attend school, have access to nutritious food and clean water, enjoy good health and development, and grow and play in a safe world.

Yet the climate crisis poses an immense and unprecedented threat to the realisation of children's rights; and climate disruption will roll back hard-won development gains that improve their lives.

Ladies and gentlemen

Despite being least responsible for this unfolding crisis, children bear the brunt of the climate-related impacts, while possessing the fewest resources to respond and cope. At its core, climate change represents a shocking abdication of one generation's responsibility to the next, violating principles of intergenerational equity.

Drought, flooding, extreme weather events, rising temperatures, and desertification directly undermine a broad spectrum of children's rights, from access to food and safe water, to housing, education, freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse, and – too frequently – their right to survive and thrive.

This generation will be made accountable for future decisions and visions on every societal level.

Young people are vital stakeholders in conflict and in peace-building, and can be agents of change and provide a foundation for rebuilding lives and communities, contributing to a more just and peaceful society.

Unfortunately, despite the catastrophic implications for children's rights posed by climate change, as well as the growing global movement of children and youth calling for ambitious climate action, recognition of children's rights barely feature in key international, regional and national decision-making frameworks related to climate change.

Therefore adequate safeguards for children's rights must be integrated in climate action, ensuring that climate projects respect, protect, promote and fulfil children's rights. Children's right to be heard must be upheld, by engaging them fully in strategies and action to meet the climate crisis.

In particular, children's right to information on climate change and related policies, as well as their right to climate and environmental education, must be recognised.

Governments should take measures to integrate climate change in formal and informal education, including green skills, to ensure that children can meaningfully participate in decision-making, and that they are not left behind in the transition to a sustainable economy.

It is well known that education can shape and transform the lives of children so that they become responsible and action-oriented citizens; citizens who take into account both their own needs and those of others.

Education and information provide the scaffolding for effective and sustainable child participation, building their capacity to innovate and adapt to the coming drastic changes.

When children and young people receive a strong education that develops environmental awareness and resilience from an early age, they become an indispensable resource as the potential disaster management experts of the future, and to-day's teachers of disaster management within the family.

Ladies and gentlemen

On a concluding note I wish to congratulate students of the 16 colleges, including Marechal College from Rodrigues, for their participation in this project competition and hope that will put into practice and propagate whatever they have learnt from these projects.

Thank you also Mrs. Rita Venkatasawmy for the involvement of your Office in raising awareness about the Climate Crisis.

Greta Thunberg, a Swedish High school student addressed an audience of mostly adults with these words: **“I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act.”**

So, let us not leave the climate crisis for our children to fix.