

WHAT<sup>is</sup>?



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Published by: Plan International and Save the Children with War Child Holland

ISBN: 978-91-7321-420-9

© 2010 Plan International and Save the Children

Project Manager: Anne-Sophie Lois

Author: Alana Kapell

Designer: PlanetYou

Art Director: Jason Robinson, PlanetYou

Illustrator: Qin Cheng

A special thank you to all the partners and staff who supported the project and especially the children and young people who provided feedback on the draft material, including: Ann-Sophie Lois; Ann Kristin Vervik, Tanja van de Linde, Clare Feinstein, Stefanie Conrad and Sarah Stevenson.

This publication was financed by: Plan Norway

The “What is...” leaflets have been developed to support the learning and education of children and adolescents. We gratefully acknowledge the existing resources that supported the development of this material. Some of the content found in the “What is...” leaflets was adapted or taken directly from a variety of sources, including: [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org); [www.un.org](http://www.un.org); <http://treaties.un.org>; [www.cyberschoolbus.un.org](http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org); Child Rights Information Network, Guide to Mechanisms for Children’s Rights.England; Child Rights Information Network, 2008. [http://www.crin.org/law/mechanisms\\_index.asp](http://www.crin.org/law/mechanisms_index.asp)

Dear Reader,

Every year, the United Nations (UN) makes important decisions that affect and impact the lives of children and young people around the world. In 2009, there was a special focus on a child's right: 'to express his or her views freely in all matters affecting him or her' – or, in other words, children's participation.

We saw this as an opportunity to support children's understanding of not only the UN but also other important processes where children's rights are discussed at international, regional and local levels. We hope that this will encourage and support children and young people to get involved in these processes.

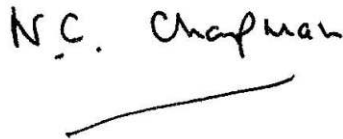
The 'WHAT IS?' leaflets are only one way for you to learn and build a greater understanding and awareness about some of the things that happen at the global/international level. You have a very important role to play in the decisions and processes that affect your life.

This information may be most useful to adults that work with children, teachers, older children, adolescents, youth and young people that are considering ways to get involved in and to influence international or UN related processes.

As needed or requested – we hope to add more leaflets and build on the information that is available to you. As a starting point, we have developed the following leaflets:

- Children's Participation
- The United Nations
- The UN General Assembly
- A Convention and a Treaty
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Special Representative
- The Omnibus Resolution
- The Security Council
- The Complaints Procedure for the CRC
- Human Rights Council

Your voice, your experiences and your opinions matter and count! Our hope is that the information found in the 'WHAT IS?' series will support you to learn, create positive change, speak out, take action and have your voice heard.

Handwritten signature of Nigel Chapman in black ink, with a horizontal line underneath.

Nigel Chapman  
CEO, Plan International

Handwritten signature of Mark Vogt in black ink.

Mark Vogt  
Director of War Child Holland

Handwritten signature of Elisabeth Dahlin in black ink.

Elisabeth Dahlin, Secretary General  
Save the Children Sweden

## What is the Human Rights Council?

The Human Rights Council (or the 'Council' for short) is part of the United Nations and is in charge of promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The Council exists to:

- Prevent discrimination and abuses
- Find ways to deal with discrimination and abuses when they happen
- Protect the people who are most in danger and at risk of discrimination and abuse



Discrimination happens when a person, or a group of people (including children), is treated badly or unfairly because of who they are, what they look like or where they come from. For example: a child may be treated badly because of the colour of their skin, because they have a disability or because of their religious beliefs or because they are poor or because they are a boy or a girl.



The Human Rights Council, along with other United Nations bodies and agencies works to protect human rights.

### What are Rights?

Human Rights are the rights and freedoms that all humans have. Every person has the same human rights, rights that are ours simply because we are born. Some of our human rights have to do with our basic physical needs to stay alive. For example, we all have the right to our lives, and to food, water, shelter, and basic health care. Some of our human rights have to do with how other people treat us. We all have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. Some of our rights have to do with our need to develop and grow, and be part of our communities. We all have the right to an education, to express our own ideas and opinions, and to participate in making decisions about issues that affect us.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: J. Young, L. Karlsson, Government Commitments to Combat Sexual Exploitation of Children- A Report for Adolescent (UNICEF, 2009).

There are many different United Nations (UN) documents and promises (known as conventions, treaties and declarations) that outline all the rights that we all have.

Conventions and treaties are legal agreements made by governments to protect men, women, children and also our planet. They highlight the promises governments have made on an issue (for example: children and women's rights), and they are part of the law, not just advice to governments.



For more information about conventions and treaties or the UN in general, please see:



**What is a Convention and Treaty?**

**What is the United Nations?**



Here are a few examples of some of the existing human rights conventions:

- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) sets out the human rights that all children have.
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) defines, 'what is discrimination against women?' and what actions are needed to stop it.

Other examples include:

- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (1984)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)
- Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990)

The UN Treaty Collection can be found at:

<http://treaties.un.org/Pages/Home.aspx?lang=en>

Here you can find all UN related treaties and conventions in their official format.



You can find a list of UN treaties and conventions and the years they were adopted by the General Assembly, at:

[http://www.un.org/documents/instruments/docs\\_en.asp?type=conven](http://www.un.org/documents/instruments/docs_en.asp?type=conven)



## Human Rights and the United Nations

Almost every United Nations (UN) body or agency is in some way involved with protecting human rights, including the Human Rights Council.

This is how the different roles are divided:

Agency/Office	Details	For more information
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)	OHCHR is the UN office for human rights and the focal point for human rights research, education, information and more. It is also the secretariat for the Human Rights Council (in other words, it is where the Council's records are kept and other important secretarial tasks are completed).	<a href="http://www.ohchr.org">www.ohchr.org</a>
High Commissioner for Human Rights	The High Commissioner for Human Rights is Navanethem Pillay. She is the head of the OHCHR and is the main human rights official for the United Nations. Her role is to help governments and provide expertise and sometimes training about many different human rights issues (for example: how to have a fair election) Her main office is in Geneva Switzerland.	<a href="http://www.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/Pages/HighCommissioner.aspx">http://www.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/Pages/HighCommissioner.aspx</a>

Agency/Office	Details	For more information
<p>Human Rights Committee</p>	<p>The Human Rights Committee works under OHCHR and is formed by a group of 'independent experts'. It is mainly responsible for a convention (or set of promises) called: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.</p> <p>(Independent Expert means that the people who sit on the Committee do not work for a specific country or government.)</p>	<p>For more information about Committees and how conventions and covenants are monitored, please see:</p> <p>'What is a Complaints Procedure for the CRC'.</p> <p>Or visit:</p> <p><a href="http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/index.htm">http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/index.htm</a></p>



Want more information about other human rights bodies? Please visit:

<http://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx>

## The Human Rights Council

The Human Rights Council is made up of people who represent 47 countries. They are elected to be part of the Council for a period of 3 years and no more than 6 years. All 47 countries of the Council must have the highest standards in promoting and protecting human rights and are reviewed regularly to ensure they are maintaining the standards.

The Council meets at least three times per year and for no less than 10 weeks total, in Geneva, Switzerland. However, they can also have special emergency sessions, for example, in January 2010 the Human Rights Council held a Special Session to look at the effects of the earthquake in Haiti and what needed to be done.

### What does the Human Rights Council do?

Some of the Council's key tasks and roles include the following:

#### Universal Periodic Review:

The Council will review the human rights situation of every country (192 in total) once every 4 years. The goal is to improve human rights in all countries and to take action when violations happen.



Want to know more?

Visit: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRmain.aspx>

## Advisory Committee:

The Advisory Committee is made of 18 members and provides the Human Rights Council with expert advice on different human rights issues (for example: the right to food).

Want to know more?

Visit: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/advisorycommittee.htm>



## Complaints Procedure:

A Complaints Procedure is used when a person or group of people feel that their rights have been violated (for example: their right to be protected from discrimination). When this happens, they may have the choice to make a complaint and have it reviewed by the Human Rights Committee.

Want to know more about Complaints Procedures? Please read:

'What is a Complaints Procedure for the CRC' or visit:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/complaints.htm>



## Special Procedures:

'Special Procedures' are one way that the Human Rights Council can address country situations (for example: in Haiti) or thematic rights issues (for example: poverty). The next section will describe them in more detail or you can find more information at:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/special/index.htm>



## Special Procedures

If the Human Rights Council is concerned about a specific human rights situation or needs to collect more information, the Council may use or set up a 'Special Procedure'.

A Special Procedure can be one person (known as a Special Rapporteur, Special Representative of the Secretary-General or an Independent Expert) or group of people (known as a Working Group). To ensure that the people involved with Special Procedures are neutral and fair, they do not receive a salary or any kind of financial compensation, in other words, they volunteer their time.

There are currently 31 thematic and 8 country 'Special Procedures' that exist. Examples include:

### Thematic:

- Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography
- Special Rapporteur on the right to education
- Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children
- Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty
- Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people
- Working Group on people of African descent
- Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons

A list of all thematic Special Procedures can be found at:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/special/themes.htm>

## Country:

- Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Sudan
- Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Haiti
- Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967

A list of all country specific Special Procedures can be found at:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/special/countries.htm>



## What do they do?

Each Special Procedure will have their own tasks to complete, depending on their area of focus (for example: education or the Sudan). However, their roles can generally include:

- Conducting studies or research to better understand the situation
- Visiting countries to meet with people and observe the situation
- Providing advice on how the situation can be improved
- Responding to complaints from individuals
- Promoting human rights in their area of focus
- Meet with children to learn and listen what they have to say



When they receive information about a rights violations, most Special Procedures will respond by sending an “urgent appeal or letter of allegation” (basically, a letter) to governments, asking them to respond and clarify the situation.

In 2008, 911 communications (or letters) were sent to governments in 118 countries.

Want more information about communications? Please visit:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/special/communications.htm>

Every year, each Special Procedure will present a report to the Human Rights Council or the General Assembly, outlining their activities, accomplishments and recommendations for the year. Resolutions (or decisions) and recommendations about what should happen next are then often made by the Council or the General Assembly.

These reports can be found at:

[http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/special/sp\\_reportshrc.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/special/sp_reportshrc.htm)



## The Human Rights Council and Children's Rights?

There are two Special Representatives that deal specifically with children's rights issues, they are:

1. Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
2. Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

You can read more about them in the leaflet:



**What is a Special Representative?**

And there are also Special Rapporteurs that address children's rights, including:

### 1. Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children

- Created in 2004
- Ms. Joy Ngozi Ezeilo (Nigeria) has been the Special Rapporteur since 2008
- For more information: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/trafficking/index.htm>

### 2. Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

- Created in 1998
- Mr. Kishore Singh (India) has been the Special Rapporteur since the 1st of August 2010
- For more information: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/education/rapporteur/index.htm>

### 3. Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

- Created in 1990 to investigate the exploitation of children around the world
- Ms. Najat M'jid Maalla of Morocco was appointed to the position in 2008
- For more information: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/children/rapporteur/index.htm>

## Annual Full Day Meeting on the Rights of the Child

Every year the Human Rights Council holds a full day meeting (or debate) on the rights of the child. Each year there is a different theme or topic, for example:

- 2009 was the first meeting and focused on the Convention on the Rights of the Child in general, recognizing it was the Convention's 20th anniversary
- 2010 the focus was on the fight against sexual violence against children
- 2011 the focus will be on the rights of children working and/or living on the street.

Each year, the Council will create a Resolution on the rights of the child and the topic for the coming year will be decided. For details on future meetings, please visit: [www.crin.org](http://www.crin.org)



A Resolution is like a 'decision' or 'recommendation' that is made by the members (or countries) that are part of the Human Rights Council. For all different issues, matters and subjects, Resolutions are written and often put to a vote and 'adopted' by the members, in other words, they declare that they agree with the decision/recommendation.

For more information about ratification and conventions, please see: [What is an Omnibus Resolution?](#)

During these annual meetings, various experts, including some of the Special Procedures, non-governmental organizations, representatives from UNICEF, countries and others can give presentations about the theme/topic.

Their goals are to:

- remember existing promises and commitments that have been made
- raise awareness and understanding
- look at what is already being done and lessons learned
- discuss new challenges
- outline actions that are needed to address the situation

During the annual day on the rights of the child many activities take place, for example NGOs and children:

- Can give oral statements (make a short 2minutes long speech) on various topics
- Can prepare written statements about various topics
- Organise a side event parallel to the main meeting
- Meet with other people who are interested in child rights to exchange ideas

You can read about previous meetings on the rights of the child by visiting:

2009 – Convention on the Rights of the Child:

<http://www.crin.org/resources/infodetail.asp?id=19800>

2010 – Fight against sexual violence against children:

[http://www.crin.org/email/crinmail\\_detail.asp?crinmailID=3269](http://www.crin.org/email/crinmail_detail.asp?crinmailID=3269)



## WHAT NOW?

What did I learn from this leaflet?

---

---

---

---

What questions do I have and where might I find the answers?

---

---

---

---

How can I use this information and are there any actions I want to take after reading this leaflet?

---

---

---

---

Who do I know that might be interested in learning more about the Human Rights Council and what can I do to help them?

---

---

---

---









