

[UNGA 72 | The rights of children to participate within civil society space must be safeguarded](#)

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On Universal Children's Day, ISHR co-hosted a side-event at the UN with CIVICUS and Save the Children. Together we called for the protection of civil society space for children and the inclusion of children in decision-making processes that affect their rights.



The [event](#) 'Protecting civil society space for and with children,' on 20 November 2017 spoke to the role children take in promoting human rights, and the barriers they face in carrying out their activities. It included panelists from civil society, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and national and local governments.

The event provided an opportunity to discuss the findings of a joint Save the Children and CIVICUS report entitled '[Peers and partners: Empowering children to take civic action](#).' The report, informed by children and reflecting their day-to-day experiences exercising their fundamental rights, found that only one-third of children feel safe sharing their views and participating in political decision-making processes. It further reported that the lack of engagement from child actors can largely be attributed to their lack of accessibility to these kinds of spaces.

'We need to be promoters of children's rights. Their potential to contribute to society is being obstructed,' said Debra Jones of Save the Children. Not only that, but hundreds of children face killings, imprisonment, and torture for participating in protests. 'Children are often not given the same legal protections as their adult counterparts, which is nonsensical considering children are particularly vulnerable members of society,' stated Tor Hodenfield of CIVICUS.

Building on this, Peter Nielsen, from the Mission of Denmark, reaffirmed Denmark's commitment to the recognition of child actors as legitimate actors that should have access to decision-making processes that affect their rights.

Christian Courtis from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted the key role of children in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), lamenting that children are often left behind in many of the SDGs, despite being the main target of several of them.

During the event, panelists and audience members discussed mechanisms to create inclusive spaces for children at the UN. Aissata Camara from the Mayor's Office for International Affairs in New York spoke about the New York City Junior Ambassadors Program, which has been successful in ensuring children's voices are heard and validated, and giving disadvantaged children the opportunity to learn about international affairs, the Sustainable Development Goals, and human rights. 'Children must be taken seriously. Children must be allowed to lead,' said Camara.

A youth participant from Afghanistan commented on the role children have in achieving gender equality and promoting human rights. However, to do so, their right to education and awareness of their human rights needs to be safeguarded.

The event can be seen on [UN Web TV](#).

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Photo: ISHR