

WAGGGS POSITION STATEMENT

Human Rights

The work of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) is firmly grounded in the international human rights framework that recognizes rights as inherent to all, inalienable and universal. As the voice of girls and young women, WAGGGS has identified human rights as a priority issue on which to take a stand and speak out.

WAGGGS believes our rights as citizens bring with them responsibilities - to make sure that we do not allow our rights to be eroded, but also to support the rights of others.

WAGGGS provides millions of girls and young women with non-formal education, giving them the opportunity to develop self-esteem, confidence and life skills. Working with Member Organizations in 144 countries, our vision is to build a better world through advocacy and action. We aim not only to speak out on behalf of girls and young women everywhere, but also to empower young women to speak out for themselves.

Human Rights Globally

- Human rights are the rights and freedoms that belong to every individual, regardless of sex, age, race, nationality or religion. Human rights are rooted in the concepts of universality, non-discrimination and equality.
- The United Nations (UN) set a common standard on human rights with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and although not legally binding, it provides the fundamental principles that are essential to lives as human beings.
- Six core human rights treaties (see below) have since been adopted that are international, legally binding documents outlining the responsibilities of states in regard to the protection, promotion and fulfilment of human rights. These human rights treaties perform three functions: they guarantee specific rights to individuals; they establish state obligations or responsibilities related to these rights; and they create mechanisms to monitor state compliance with these obligations and/or allow individuals to seek redress for violations of their rights.
- Since human rights treaties are based on international law, they are only binding when a state voluntarily accepts the terms of the treaty. In becoming a ‘party’ to a treaty or ‘ratifying’ it, a state accepts obligations to apply the provisions of the treaty and to accept international supervision of this compliance.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a landmark treaty that guarantees children the right to be free from discrimination, to be protected in armed conflicts and from torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, to be free from arbitrary deprivation of liberty, to receive age-appropriate treatment in the justice system, and to be free from economic exploitation and other abuses.
- It was decided that children need a special convention for them because people under 18 years old often require specific consideration and protection and leaders wanted to ensure that the world recognized children have human rights too. As a result the Convention on the Rights of the Child received final approval at the UN General Assembly in 1989 and became legally binding in September 1990 after 20 States had ratified it.
- It is now the most widely ratified human rights treaty and as of December 2005, nearly all States are parties. By agreeing to undertake the obligations of the Convention national governments have committed themselves to protecting and ensuring children's rights and they have agreed to hold themselves accountable to this commitment before the international community.

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- The Convention firmly sets the focus on the whole child – both as an individual and as a member of a family and community with rights and responsibilities. There are three main rights in the Convention: **non-discrimination** where all rights apply to all children regardless of race, sex, religion, language and disability or family background; **best interest** when decisions are made about children they should always consider the best interest of the particular child; **the child’s opinion** as children have a right to say what they think about anything that affects them.
- The other key areas of rights in the Convention include the **‘Self’** – with a right to a name, to a nationality, to express their thoughts, to join organizations, to privacy and to access to information; **‘Services’** where all children have the right to physical and health care, education, adequate standard of living, a clean, safe and healthy environment and a range of leisure activities; and **‘Protection’** with a right to protection from abuse or neglect, from dangerous drugs, from sexual exploitation, from harmful work, to defend themselves if accused of a crime and protection in times of war.
- However, the convention can only become a reality when respected by everyone – in the home, within the family, in schools, in communities. By ratifying the Convention governments state their intention to put this commitment into practice and are obligated to amend and create laws and policies to fully implement the commitments.
- The **Committee on the Rights of the Child** is the body of experts responsible for monitoring States’ implementation of the Convention. Composed of 18 experts, reports are submitted by States within two years of ratification and every five years thereafter. The Committee looks at how well governments are setting and meeting the standards for the realization and protection of children’s rights.
- The Convention is the first human rights treaty that grants a role in its implementation to a specialized United Nations agency – **UNICEF** – which has a legal obligation to promote and protect children’s rights by supporting the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF also facilitates broad consultations within States to maximize the accuracy and impact of reports to the Committee.

Optional Protocols

- Human rights treaties are often followed by ‘optional protocols’ which are additional legal mechanisms to complement and add to the treaty. They may be on any relevant topic. To address the growing abuse and exploitation of children worldwide, the UN General Assembly in 2000 adopted two optional protocols to the Convention to increase the protection of children from involvement in armed conflicts and from sexual exploitation.
- The **Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict** establishes 18 as the minimum age for compulsory recruitment and requires States to do everything they can to prevent individuals under the age of 18 from taking a direct part in hostilities. The **Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography** draws special attention to the criminalization of these serious violations of children’s rights and emphasizes the importance of increased public awareness and international cooperation in efforts to combat them, as well as the provision of legal and other support services to victims
- A protocol is not automatically binding for those States that have already ratified the Convention. They must independently choose whether or not to be bound by a protocol and it has its own ratification mechanisms. Currently, (2007) the children in armed conflict protocol has 122 signatories, and the protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography, 115 signatories.

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CEDAW – The Women’s Convention

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is an international treaty which lists the human rights of women. Commonly referred to as the ‘Women’s Convention’ or ‘CEDAW’, the Convention was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 and entered into force in 1981. As of November 2006, 185 countries have signed CEDAW - over ninety percent of the members of the UN (although many have made reservations in relation to it).
- CEDAW defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The Convention defines discrimination against women as "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field".
- The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life, education, health and employment. Governments agree to take all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- The Convention is the only human rights treaty which affirms the reproductive rights of women and targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations. It affirms women's rights to acquire, change or retain their nationality and the nationality of their children. States which have signed the Convention also agree to take appropriate measures against all forms of trafficking in women and exploitation of women.
- Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations.
- CEDAW is overseen by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women which works to define and elaborate the general guarantees of non-discrimination in human rights treaties and prepare recommendations on key and urgent issues.

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WAGGGS calls on the international community and national governments to take stronger action to implement the provisions of the human rights conventions and fulfil their promises to the children of the world by:

- **Ensuring** national legislation is fully compatible with the human rights conventions
- **Establishing** appropriate national focal points/commissions to promote and protect children’s rights
- **Allocating** sufficient public funds for relevant children’s services and support
- **Sensitizing and training** those involved in policy-making and working with children on the fundamental principles of the human rights conventions
- **Involving** and including children in decisions that affect them to ensure their voice is heard and respected

WAGGGS urges Member Organizations to:

- **Raise** public awareness about the conventions and their goals
- **Educate** members as well as others on the issues of rights and responsibilities
- **Participate** in the national reporting and monitoring process of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and CEDAW
- **Campaign** and mobilize community and local support and work with other child-rights groups and organizations
- **Help** children to understand and realize their rights as enshrined in the conventions
- **Produce** and distribute materials about human rights and responsibilities within communities and local groups
- **Voice** any concerns on human rights to the media to help raise awareness
- **Highlight** the key rights issues that WAGGGS should focus on at the international level

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is accompanied by **six core human rights treaties**;

- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Every country in the world has ratified at least one of these, and many have ratified most.

For more information:

- Convention on the Rights of the Child, visit www.unhchr.ch or www.unicef.org
- CEDAW, visit www.un.org/womenwatch
- Human Rights Treaties, www.untreaty.un.org

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How WAGGGS is addressing Human Rights:

- WAGGGS' theme for 2002 to 2008 is **Our Rights, Our Responsibilities**. Human rights issues, particularly as they relate to young people as part of the global community, are explored in this triennial theme under six broad headings:
 - The Right to be Me
 - The Right to be Heard
 - The Right to be Happy
 - The Right to Work Together
 - The Right to Learn
 - The Right to Live in Peace.
- Under the Our Rights, Our Responsibilities theme, WAGGGS produced Activity Packs for individual members and Member Organizations for each of the six Rights. The packs contain an introduction on how each right is linked with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The packs provide ideas for discussions and activities. UNICEF provided one of the modules for the pack.

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CASE STUDIES

The Olympia Badge

As part of the Our Rights Our Responsibilities theme, the Greek Girl Guides Association created the WAGGGS Olympia Badge which is a sport-oriented activity pack. The pack was published worldwide by WAGGGS. It promotes the original Olympic philosophy placing values like noble competition, peace, culture and education. Currently Hong Kong Girl Guides are adapting the curriculum for the XXIX Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008.

“Siyacoca” (“talking to each other”) – The Right to Live in Peace

The Girl Guides Association of South Africa (GGASA) is running a project on the need to respect human rights focussing on fighting violence against women. The project is called the “Siyacoca” (“talking to each other”) – *The Right to Live in Peace*.

30 Peace Ambassadors in the Eastern Cape Province aged between 15 and 25 were trained in peer education techniques. The Peace Ambassadors are running ‘mini-projects’ in five of the six Eastern Cape regions where they come from.

Information packs on human and children’s rights were sent to all regions to involve as many girls as possible in the programme. Each branch (Rangers, Guides, Brownies/Teddies) was provided with a selection of age appropriate activities and tasks related to the Right to Live in Peace. Each girl who successfully completes a number of tasks is awarded the “Right to Live in Peace Badge”. Each Girl Guide who completes the challenge also becomes part of the SA Guiding Peace Ambassadors network.

"There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they can grow up in peace." Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General at the United Nations