

# CHILDREN'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY MANIFESTO 2022

*"Did you know that the earth is flat?"*

*"Have you heard that humankind have never actually been on the moon?"*

*"Did you realize that climate change isn't real?"*

Dear friends, adults, and distinguished members of the UN General Assembly.

We live in a time where we, the children of the world, learn that truth is up for debate. Where facts can be alternative. And news can be fake. The first phrases of this manifesto are just examples that we have encountered in our lives. Many more could be added. As a child, it is a frustrating, confusing, and sensitive time to grow up in. And for you, decision makers of the world, it is a frustrating, confusing, and sensitive time to lead people. Now, more than ever, we need to ensure that all people – big and small – can stand up to misinformation, radicalization, and exploitation. To that end, we need better education.

That is why we are addressing you today.

We represent the 2,2 billion children all over the world. Today we are their microphone.

Over the past six months, we, 80 children from 42 countries, have come together to discuss and share perspectives on the common challenges we face and how we solve them. 80 different perspectives. 80 different struggles. And yet, we have a common message: We need better education to solve the issues that threaten our existence. Not only widespread misinformation – but also:

- The climate change that is making the Earth crumble underneath our feet, making the rivers we swim in dry out, forcing families to leave their homes.
- The extreme poverty pushing an estimated 356 million children into a daily struggle to put food on their plate and a roof above their heads – for barely 2 dollars a day.
- Tyrants, dictators, and terrorists claiming children's lives right where we live, where we play, every day.

We want to thank you for letting us speak today and giving us the opportunity to bring this overall message of education to you. We stand at a crossroad after two years of COVID and a global health crisis where the right to education was stunted. In many parts of the world, in this time of vulnerability and insecurity, home schooling was not an option due to the lack of computers, internet connection or even electricity. We need *your help* to ensure education for all of us. No matter how we live, how we see the world - and what the balance is on our parents' bank account.

We know that this task is enormous. But the impact of better education would be even bigger. Because schools are not just schools. They are not just four walls with a lot of books and blackboards inside. They are the center of our local communities. Our schools are where we meet our friends, play sports, and eat our lunch together. Our schools are where we learn democracy in practice.

Awareness created through education will help in solving the incomprehensible problems we face. Education is the key to solving all other issues. Education is the fundamental lens

through which we see the world and form opinions – thus it is of utmost importance that it is open minded and available to all. People that are educated are equipped to help in our struggle for a better future. Education gives us the tools to engage in society, to battle inequality, to counter injustice. And to take on the common responsibility of creating change.

Unfortunately, education is still not a given in many regions of the world. About 258 million children around the world are uneducated (UNESCO). That needs to change.

We need your help to ensure that schools are not only accessible. The schools of the future need to provide the ultimate sense of security. This is what we would like to call: Safe space education.

Safe space education are schools where children and their grown-ups can feel safe that what they learn is right. A place where misinformation, conspiracy theories and alternative facts are debated and debunked. Where we are equipped to think freely and ask questions without censorship, restraint or fear of reprisal.

Safe space education are schools that can be a safe haven for all children – no matter who they are, how they look, where they come from. Even the most remote, rural areas should have a school with open doors. Open doors to all – and where all are equal.

Safe space education offers an inclusive learning environment for children with different abilities and learning styles. We need to build suitable and appropriate environments for learning that also cater to people who are not necessarily academically gifted but who has other talents to nurture.

Safe space education are schools that are free from violence of any kind – physical or mental. Education is crucial to our well-being, so we should be allowed to expect more than the bare minimum

To ensure safe space education for all we need to work together across borders. Outsourcing from countries that have existing successful models of challenges faced. Sending professionals from countries that has a more developed education system to countries that are currently developing their education system. Higher income countries helping lower income countries - just as we have witnessed during the pandemic.

You might think that this is a message you have heard before. It is so obvious, simple and predictable that children choose education as the topic to highlight. More than 200 years ago, then US president Thomas Jefferson noted that education is instrumental in happiness and freedom. Our question to you is simple: If this is all so banal, why haven't we fixed it yet? Why are we still talking about it?

Unfortunately, listening is one of the sparse resources these days. We often witness governments not listening to their citizens: making policies with self-serving intentions, shutting down protests with violence and by hiding important information from the public.

We need you to listen. Now. We need you to listen, learn and lead. Not just for our sake. But for your own. For the world. Help us make safe space education the standard. Because this is the way to battle misinformation, bridge the divide between people and their governments and ultimately create world change.

Children are more resourceful than you think. Stop placing us at the children's table. We are not the leaders of Tomorrow. If you allow us a place at the table and listen to us, we are the leaders of Today. If we have learned one thing when working together 80 children from 42 countries from all continents, it is that we are creative, we are resourceful and we are prepared to be part of the solution to the biggest problems in the world. Let us be a part of the solution.

Dear politicians, decision makers and other adults:

The earth is not flat.  
Humankind has been on the moon several times.  
Climate change is – unfortunately – very real.

But we need your help to make sure that generations to come get access to the education necessary to understand this world in all its vast complexity. Education enables change.

Help us ensure safe space education. For us. For you. For the world. And for generations to come.

Thank you for your time!

