

## **CHILD POLICY FORUM OF NEW YORK**

**Publication of the Children's Studies Center  
Brooklyn College of The City University of New York**

**Proceedings of the  
Fourth Child Policy Forum of New York**

### **YOUTH FORUM**

**The Human Rights of Children:  
On the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*  
and the  
20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the  
*U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child***

**A Children's Studies Cosponsored Event  
in Collaboration with  
The Schomburg Center  
for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library  
515 Malcolm X Boulevard  
New York, New York 10037**

**November 20, 2009**

## Opening Presentation

**Deirdre Lynn Hollman**

**Manager, Schomburg Center Public Education Programs**

We welcome students from the School for Human Rights, Brooklyn College Academy, Frederick Douglass Academy, Cypress Hill Collegiate Prep, the Facing History School and the Schomburg Center Junior Scholars Program. We are going to open our program today with a presentation from the Schomburg Center Junior Scholars spoken word team; give them your full attention and welcome.

*Spoken word, video, poster and performance art presentations were given by students from the Brooklyn College Academy, Schomburg Center Junior Scholars Program and The School for Human Rights.*

## Welcome

**Deirdre Lynn Hollman**

Please welcome Mr. Christopher Paul Moore, Schomburg Center historian, researcher and author, speaking on behalf of Mr. Howard Dodson, the director of the Schomburg Center.

**Christopher Paul Moore**

Thank you very much. Officially, I'd like, on behalf of the Children's Studies Center of Brooklyn College, The City University of New York, to welcome you to "The Fourth Child Policy Forum of New York Youth Forum: The Human Rights of Children on the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the U.N. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*."

Schomburg Center is founded on the precept of human rights and childhood education. Arturo Alfonso Schomburg is our founder. He was raised and born in Puerto Rico. His father was German and his mother was Afro-Puerto Rican. When he was ten-years-old, in the fifth grade, a teacher told him that Africans had made absolutely no contribution to mankind. He thought about that phrase sort of the way we think about it and he actually dedicated his life to collecting materials worldwide from what we call the African Diaspora. Africans live in the Caribbean, South America, Asia and throughout the world. He brought those collections together, which is the foundation of the Schomburg Center. This whole discussion of desegregation is not new — nor human rights — to Americans, black or white.

A quick look at our history — you remember slavery from around 1619 to 1865, well that was followed by a period called Jim Crow, from about 1865 to 1965, which is in my lifetime. This Jim Crow legalized discrimination in education, housing and employment — it pretty much sets the tone for where we are today. In fact, in the 1950s,

I grew up in the North and went to an integrated school, but there were still pockets of segregation. There were, in Suffern, New York, swimming pools where blacks were not allowed; people of color were not allowed. When we would take our drives to Alabama — that is where my father was from — we would go south, and I was about five-years-old, just learning to read. I think I learned to read because I was reading signs that said “For Whites Only” “For Colored.” This was at a time when the first hotels and motels on that ride down South were being built. They were all brand new, so I wondered ‘why can’t we stop someplace?’ and I’d see them. My father would find some little turn off and we’d go to a little old house, a boarding house, and my brother and I and my father stayed in one bed in one room and my two sisters and my mother stayed in the other room. It’s like 1959, so it’s not that far behind. So this topic has been with us for a very, very, long time. And, to take this a little further, we’ve already seen some of the wonderful expressions of our youth.

I’m very proud to be able to introduce a very important figure in the field of human rights and children’s rights and that is Dr. Gertrud Lenzer, Professor of Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center and Director of the Children’s Studies Program and Center at Brooklyn College. Please welcome Dr. Lenzer.

## **Opening Remarks**

**Gertrud Lenzer**

**Professor of Sociology and Children’s Studies, Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center**

**Director, Children’s Studies Program and Center, Brooklyn College, CUNY**

Thank you, Mr. Moore. Welcome to all of you assembled here at the *Child Policy Forum of New York* dedicated to “The Human Rights of Children: On the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Brown. v. Board of Education* and the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the U.N. *Convention on the Rights of the Child.*”

I would like to share a secret with you — you may not have thought about this but both *Forums* organized in collaboration by the Children’s Studies Center of The City University and the Schomburg Center on Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library were actually organized for you — whom I would like to call our fellow students, because no matter how old you are, in the academic world you still remain a student. These events have been organized for youth: to enhance and promote the rights of young people. We as adults are secondary in these *Forums*, a statement which will no doubt leave some of you skeptical. Well, in the first place, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) led to school desegregation. This great ruling affirmed for the first time in the United States that children (meaning human beings ages 0-18 — that is one legal definition of childhood) have substantive rights in this country. That means you have rights, which before *Brown v. Board* you did not have. In that sense we go beyond the imperatives of desegregation—which are necessary and indispensable. But at the same time this decision of the U.S. Supreme Court established as law that you and members of other minorities have substantive rights. Some understanding of this circumstance is very

important, especially for those of you who know how many of your friends and acquaintances have gotten into trouble or have sat in juvenile detention facilities and so on. At about the same time *In re Gault* — another Supreme Court decision—it was established that children and young people have procedural rights: you cannot just be hauled away into prison or clapped into confinement, or whatever: in these circumstances you have the same rights as adults.

Our second celebration concerns the U.N. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Again in this major international human rights treaty, the definition of a child is from birth to the age of eighteen or whenever, in a particular country, legal maturity occurs. This human rights treaty on behalf of children and young people around the world is also all about you; it is only secondarily about adults in the sense that it tells us adults how we should respect and treat you. It tells us what rights you have. This treaty establishes that children be regarded as rights-holders — and this includes civil rights, political rights, social rights, economic rights and cultural rights. You are rights holders with sets of specific entitlements. You have the text of the treaty, and I encourage you to start reading and looking at it. It is one of the great documents in the history of human rights as a whole, and it is, in fact, based on and has its roots in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948. I will read to you very briefly from Article 2 of this *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:

“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.”

Our Children’s Studies Center and Program, which has collaboratively organized today’s *Child Policy Forum of New York*, has human rights as its overarching framework. Both the U.N. *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) and the U.S. Supreme Court decisions provide important foundations for our work in pedagogy and policy research. So even though the United States has not ratified the CRC, today is a very, very special day. You, like many people around the globe, are gathered here to celebrate — it’s really a global birthday party — the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this treaty. Many other events are happening around the globe. That is why we have scheduled our *Youth Forum* here for today.

Now obviously *Brown v. Board* and the treaty on the Rights of the Child represents a beginning; even though one is 55-years-old, the other 20-years-old. We have much work ahead of us on your behalf. You should participate and you should feel that you are entitled to participate. Indeed, you are called upon to participate. Dr. Karunan, the Chief of Adolescent Development and Participation at UNICEF Headquarters here in New York will talk about this in his keynote address. In the course of the last ten years the movement for participation among young people has grown. Dr. Karunan will tell you some of the magnificent developments that have happened in this respect around the world. The right to participate and to be heard is specifically articulated in Article 12 of

the CRC. It stipulates that children and adolescents must be heard depending on your developing capacity to do so. I am quoting from Article 12:

“States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

The second paragraph continues this argument:

For this purpose the child shall in particular be provided with the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administration proceedings affecting a child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

In your case, the Disciplinary Code of the New York City School System comes to mind. It so happened that this Wednesday, *The New York Times* reported on a documentary, entitled *The War on Kids*, about public schools in New York City. This documentary examines the public school system and its disciplinary methods and it relates directly to the second exhibit — in addition to the *Courage Exhibit* — here at the Schomburg Center, focusing on disadvantaged minorities in the New York City school system, with its almost 1.1 million students. Nearly 10 percent of your fellow-students, in effect, are in disciplinary proceedings. As emerged from discussions with family court judges in New York City, only 3 percent of those 10 percent, that means 3 percent of 100,000 or so, have adequate representation when it comes to disciplinary actions; suspension, etc. etc. You also need to know that 85 percent of those 1.1 million in New York City public schools are minority students. We have, what I call, a fortress of minority students not an “Ivory Tower” — a fortress of segregated young people. I would like to share this information with you in order to emphasize that today’s *Forum* is not just some kind of academic production for the purpose of keeping you entertained or having you spend one school day morning here.

A great deal of work is still ahead of us to make the provisions of both *Brown v. Board* and of the CRC a reality. But the students assembled here must be regarded as representing all those at the center of our attention. We at the Children’s Studies Center of The City University of New York — our faculty, staff and students — hope that you will be in touch and, if you are so inclined, work with us. You have our contact information (website and e-mail address) in today’s program. We at the Children’s Studies Center are looking forward to working with you and on your behalf.

It is now my distinct pleasure and great privilege to introduce to you Dr. Victor Karunan. We have been working together with him in the field of children and young people for almost 20 years. Please welcome Dr. Karunan.

# Keynote Address

**Victor Karunan**

**Chief, Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP)**

**Division of Policy and Practice, UNICEF Headquarters, New York**

(Speech as submitted by Victor Karunan):

Good morning. I come from India. I was born in Bangalore in the south of India – which is known as the “Indian Silicon Valley” and is one of the most developed cities in the country. My childhood, my school and college years in India were very strongly linked to the Youth Movement and to the Human Rights Movement in the country in the days of turbulence in Asia during the 1970s and 1980s. Just as much as you have Martin Luther King in this country, we also had Mahatma Gandhi in our country. Just as you had the Civil Rights Movement in this country, we had what Gandhi called a “Satyagraha” (“Satya” means truth, “Graha” means force — Truth Force” — the nonviolent movement to bring about independence for India from British colonial rule. So we have many things in common and I can relate to the five young people this morning who presented powerful messages of what history teaches us. But we also forget history very quickly. It is important that we remind ourselves of our history and how we have come here following the path of many millions of people who struggled and gave their lives for freedom, human rights and democracy.

I now work here in New York as the Chief of the Adolescent Development and Participation Unit in UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund. I work in this job primarily with young people in one hundred-sixty countries around the world. Everywhere I travel, every group of young people that I meet in the rich and poor countries in the industrialized world and the developing world, one common theme emerges, ‘we want to be involved — we want to participate.’ I heard that again this morning, young people want the right to participate. That is what I am going to focus on in my brief presentation to you this morning.

I am going to begin with a film made by UNICEF for advocacy on child rights in industrialized countries, to show you a snapshot of some of the work that UNICEF has supported in different parts of the world, particularly with young people like you.

*[UNICEF film is shown.]*

I want to reflect a little bit on one of the topics that we saw in that film, which is on the right to participation. The first thing to say is that participation as a basic human right is not a gift or a privilege; it’s not something that you get during Christmas or your Birthday as a gift. It is something that, like any other right in the Convention or in the Human Rights treaties, is a fundamental and basic human right. You inherit that the moment you are born; every human being has this fundamental right. This is a right for all children who are capable of expressing their view, giving opinions or contributing to change. In essence, it is a fundamental right for all children, not only a few.

UNICEF calls for a special focus on the most marginalized and the most vulnerable; the voiceless children in the world today. That is where a lot of our programs and money go: for children who are very poor, who are disabled, who are indigenous, who are minorities, who are voiceless and for those who are disadvantaged. One of the first things to know is that we have very many ways of talking about this group of young people and a lot of legal problems when it comes to defining and conceptualizing them. There are intense discussions within the governments and within the United Nations still about these different definitions.

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) defines children as all human beings below the age of 18 years. Adolescents are defined as those between 10 and 19 years—a definition that comes from the World Health Organization, WHO. Youth, as defined by the United Nations General Assembly in 1995 when for the first time it adopted a resolution on youth, is between 15 to 24 years and young people are between 10 to 24 years. This is as far as the United Nations is concerned. Governments have their own definitions based on given cultural, historical and social considerations.

But these legal definitions and debates should not inhibit us from reaching out and working with young people. Participation is a process of shared decisions which affect one's life in the community; it is a means by which democracy is built and the standards by which democracy should be judged. In many ways the right to participation establishes a norm and a standard of democracy in societies. In other words, what this means is the right to have information, to express one's views and opinions, the desire to learn, to form views, to take part in activities, initiate ideas, respect others with dignity, and form groups and associations and act together. The last one is very important and one of the most radical provisions in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. It gives the right to young people to form groups and to organize themselves. This is a source of some intense debates among governments, because not all governments recognize rights of formal associations and organizations of youth unless the national legal age has been obtained.

First of all, the right to participation in the CRC is actually a cluster of rights. For those of you who have studied human rights, you would notice that participation is not a concept used in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. But it defines a cluster of rights that young people have and these are based on the “evolving capacities of the child” — another new concept introduced by the CRC. What this means is that young people grow and mature based on their own personal growth, their environment, their family, their community, their social-cultural context in which they grow and develop. What this also means is that for a ten-year-old child in Senegal, the level of development of that ten-year-old child is not the same as a ten-year-old child in New York City. The environment, the context is vastly different. Two ten-year-old children from two different parts of the world are not the same. This is what is meant by evolving capacity: you evolve your capabilities and your ability to speak and communicate and participate based on your own personal growth, your context and your environment.

Second, the main article, Article 12, which gives the right to express views freely, and not only to express your views — this is often what adults do not note: that when you express your rights as young people, adults have the obligation to respect that and to take that into account. Article 13, the freedom of expression: you have the right to express your views. You have the freedom to seek, receive and impart information. You have a right to know when somebody knocks on your door, ‘Who are you? Do you have an identity? What do you want from me?’ You have a right to seek that information. Article 14, respect the rights of children to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, a very important right. And finally the one I mentioned, the most radical of all articles, Article 15, which is the freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

The right to participation as a human right is therefore, first of all, non-negotiable. It is not something that you ask for as a gift or a privilege from adults, it is something that is inherited and therefore you have a right to exercise this right as a human being. It is non-negotiable — in the classroom, in a family, in the community, or in society. Second, it means that there are claim-holders, whose rights are not met, and there are duty-bearers, who have the responsibility to act. In this case the child is a claim-holder and the adult is the duty-bearer. The third important thing that we saw in the film is that rights always go with two other R’s: “respect” and “responsibility.” So you cannot express a right to the detriment of being responsible for the consequences of your actions. You do not have the right to express your views without taking into account the respect for the person who is receiving that information or that view. Another important point in the right to participation is that participation is not just a one-off act; it is not just one meeting like this on a Friday morning. It is not just one time when you stand up in the classroom and say something to your teacher or one time when you tell your parents that you have another view about what they decided; but is something that is an ongoing process that should be gradually institutionalized. It is a process that becomes systematic, embedded and integrated within families, schools, communities and society as a whole. The right to participation can be realized to the full only when it moves away from being a one-off event.

There are many implications of these rights. Three concepts are important in the fulfillment of these rights. First, that young people are provided opportunities and choices. If you do not have the opportunity, you are not able to exercise the right. Second, you have the capacities, and that your capacity is recognized to contribute, give a view or to participate. Third, an enabling environment is provided for you to be able to speak, to participate and to contribute. Opportunities, capacities and the enabling environment—these three elements are fundamental to promote meaningful and sustainable participation.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, which adopted the General Comment [GC] on Article 12 in July 2009, for the first time issued what is called a General Comment, on one of the guiding principles of the CRC. The GC is a formal guidance to governments on how to implement certain articles in the Convention. Every government that has signed the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* now has clear guidance from the Committee as to how to implement this right, how to partner with young people and



how to partner with schools, families and communities to support and ensure that these rights are fulfilled. Why did the CRC Committee do this? They wanted to support the State Parties (meaning governments) to effectively implement participation rights, understand better what these rights mean, elaborate the scope for legislation and propose basic requirements as to what is required for the governments to do in order to ensure that these rights are protected. The General Comment itself has many sections; one important section was the right to participation in legal and administrative procedures. As you know in the area of Juvenile Justice there are big issues and big problems with the right to participation. UNICEF and Save the Children are now supporting the CRC Committee to prepare a handbook on GC Article 12 for governments to help them to implement the rights to participation. This handbook will provide more guidance to government agencies on what other countries have done, to give them some good practices and guidance on how to effectively implement Article 12.

We have also focused and invested a lot in research and documentation and online platforms — Voices of Youth, which you will see on the UNICEF website, which is our main online platform for communicating with young people. We have also produced various publications, research, manuals on child participation. Many of these are aimed at governments or regional commissions like the European Commission, the African Commission, or the Asia-Pacific Commissions.

What are some of the lessons we have learnt at UNICEF in promoting children and young peoples' participation over these 10 years? Firstly, our experience has shown — as you heard in the film — that participation of young people has significantly contributed to increasing their awareness on children's rights. It's helped not only to increase the young peoples' awareness of rights but also the awareness of adults, their communities, their peer groups, their classmates and others. Secondly, participation in policy-making has in itself perpetuated self-replicating outcomes, meaning that in policy work the influence of one policy, like in the case of Juvenile Justice, Juvenile Law, has had a ripple effect on other policies that have taken into account the right to participation. Thirdly, through participation, young people have also developed self esteem, leadership and advocacy skills. It has been a positive learning experience for young people. Fourthly, we have learned that it is very important that participation is seen as a two-way street. The children's right to participation or the young peoples' rights to participation also means that the adults are able to respond to it, adults are able to create the environment for that participation. Therefore, it is extremely important to involve adult decision-makers in the development of participation mechanisms. This is one of the areas we are investing heavily in to work with governments, parliamentarians, law makers and ombudspersons for children.

We've also learned that it is important not to look at the right to participation in piecemeal or segregated way, but [to view] participation as an integrated and holistic approach. We've also learned that it means providing opportunities for promoting the voices of those who are voiceless; the most marginalized, the most vulnerable. Therefore our emphasis is on trying to reach the young people who do not have the access to the kinds of forums that young people generally do. Finally we have found in the area of

participation — using music, drama, role plays — theater and creative arts have become very powerful tools, and some of these non-traditional methods and tools have helped us to be able to more effectively promote the participation of young people.

However, there are many challenges ahead even after over twenty years of history of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and about ten years of history of promoting specifically the right to participation. What are some of these challenges? One of the first challenges we have is the negative attitude in general among adults in societies and in the media towards children and young people and their capacities. As we turn on the television, we hear all the negative things about young people — about crimes, about the irresponsibility, juvenile delinquency and so on. You read the newspapers in the morning and there again is all the negative portrayal of young people. One of the challenges for us is how to shift that to a positive approach towards adolescents and young people. Negative attitudes are prevalent in society and that is one of the biggest challenges we have; not just in the attitude of many adults, but also in mainstream media and in civil society.

Second, in some countries, particularly those which are in conflict or under authoritarian rule of different sorts, the political climate is a very difficult barrier to overcome when you promote participation. This political environment is not conducive to promoting the meaningful participation of young people. If you do not have democracy in a society or you do not have the participation of people in general, it is very difficult to think of the participation of young people in those contexts. Third, are the structure barriers with partner institutions. Some of the partners we work with, whether they are governments or donors or foundations, present some structural barriers that impede us from working with young people more effectively.

A big gap that we find, which limits the work with young people, is the lack of adequate data. Young people in general are not counted in many surveys or data collection methods. So by not being counted, young people are not visible for policymakers to frame laws to provide services and programs for young people. Therefore a lot of investment is being made by various UN and academic organizations and the research community in data gathering and research on adolescents and young people. We also have a challenge of the lack of expertise in working with young people, adults not having the skills and the capacities to be able to work with young people. One of the challenges for us is how to build that capacity with adults whether they are teachers, caregivers, parents. or others. Many adults do not have the skills and the abilities to be able to respond to the changing identity, growth and development of young people in the world today. In many regions we are working towards addressing the challenge of developing strategies for governments — policy frameworks to advise them on how better to partner with young people.

Another big challenge is the gender challenge — how to promote the participation of girls as much as boys — in many situations. Because of the gender imbalances in the country — gender inequalities that are quite pervasive — many girls are left out of the

right to participate. Another major constraint is the lack of resources — the lack of investment in youth programming by governments, by donors and by the private sector.

In conclusion, the main point of my presentation has been that children have the right to participate. It is inherent, it is part of the right to exercise your citizenship, it is part of the growth and development of children and young people and there are many ways by which we can ensure that these rights are promoted and fulfilled.

Let us not forget, participation of children and young people is a fundamental right and not a gift or a privilege.

Thank you very much.

*(Loud applause)*

## **Student Presentations**

**Moderated by Deirdre Lynn Hollman  
Manager, Schomburg Public Education Programs**

My name is Deirdre Hollman. I am the public education programs manager here at the Schomburg Center and I am really excited that all of you have traveled from different parts of the city to participate in today's event. I am happy now to bring to the stage two groups from among you who will be presenting their projects, reflecting on the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Human Rights and *Brown v. Board of Education*. The first group that I would like to bring up is the School for Human Rights.

*[Student presentations follow.]*

**Deirdre Lynn Hollman**

Ladies and gentlemen, tweens and teens, this part of the program is all about all of you. We spent the morning together learning, listening, viewing the exhibition. We, here at the Schomburg Center and our colleagues and partners at the Brooklyn College Children's Studies Center, want to hear from you. What does all of this mean to you? How are you reflecting on the information being presented today? Dr. Victor Karunan spoke about what he and UNICEF are doing on behalf of child-related policy internationally. Dr. Lenzer spoke about what she and her colleagues are investing in and seeking to do and making change on a state and local level in New York City. We want to hear about you, what are you seeking? What questions do you have in your schools, in your lives, in your communities? What's on your mind? So we'll have a question and answer session. You do not have to have a question. We are also open to hear you give us a piece of what is on your mind right now. What are you thinking about? What would you like to share?

## **Student Comments**

**Comment**

I wanted to say that everything I heard today was real. It takes your mind to see different things and you realize that stuff does happen. And, because we have the better stuff in life, we have privileges. People died for us to have education. For people to cut school, not to go to school and not do what they have to do—they are making everyone look bad. Like they said, black people get thrown out, like thrown out in the dirt. We look stupid and we are making ourselves look stupid and we are making it true to what everyone else is saying. It's not only black people; it could be white people, hispanics, Mexicans, whoever, but we always get labeled the most. I feel like we hear this all the time and people think nothing of it. When I get older, I want to advocate. I could do it now, too, and I did at my school. I did it with my art class; we had advocacy lab. It was nice and I feel like everyone should go out there and try to do something because we can make a change.

**Comment**

I just wanted to say that watching all this today kind of made me think twice about what we go through in life today. It makes me realize that the stuff that I'm unappreciative for, that it is important to recognize and pay attention to, because not everyone has what you have. And also that a lot of things that we find important nowadays aren't, they really are not. Some people — it's crazy how we are all human beings and we are one in the same, but people on the opposite side of the world, they don't have as much as we have. They don't have the simple things that we are just oblivious to. We should take recognition to what's going on in the world and we should participate and partake in making the world a better place.

**Comment**

Everything that was said onstage is absolutely true. And, like what the girl from Brooklyn College said, nobody really takes into consideration what we have; we take everything for granted. I'm not saying everybody personally, but in general, a lot of teens usually take things for granted and we don't appreciate the lesser things in life. Like materialistic items, everybody wants that new Gucci, Polo... everybody wants what's in. But if anything, once you realize it, it's not what is important. You shouldn't really care about what other people think about you.

You are right that it's not a privilege, it's a right — everybody does deserve the right to speak what's on their mind and everyone does have the right to think. Everyone has the right, not to do as they please, but everyone just has the right to be themselves and to an education, because with education there is power. Without that power you aren't going to get anywhere.

**Comment**

First off, I'm an African, so back home, you hear advertisements on TV that people are hungry and this and that. And, that's true — yes, some people are starving and can't get things to eat. They can't get certain items that we have now. For example, you go out to McDonalds and it's like what, two dollars for a hamburger? Back home

that would be somebody's monthly salary, somebody's yearly salary. That means they don't get to eat like we do, they don't have the things that we do.

We do deserve rights, but the thing is, people — the grown-ups nowadays, they aren't going to be around to give us those rights. So we have to fight for it ourselves, we have to advocate for ourselves. We have to go out there and make things ours because nothing is ever going to get put into your life; you have to take what you want and what is yours. I guess that's pretty much it.

### **Comment**

What I wanted to say is that watching all the things today have empowered me to continue my own personal fight. I have a job working with the New York Civil Liberties Union and I am a teen advocate. What my job primarily does is to educate minors on their rights and the rights of the law in the state. Recently, I just came from a trip from Nicaragua to go build a school in a developing country. So I have seen firsthand what some of that stuff looks like. Before I left, I'd always see the advertisements—see those people on the commercials on TV with nothing better to do. [But now] I'm watching and I'm like, "Well, that's sad. Let me do something about it." But there is a difference between learning and volunteering and experiencing it in real life. When you experience it, you live as they do and you live in their culture and you get to personally see what they do and do it yourself. It's a whole new ball game on how that affects you personally.

And now that I've come back after going there, my fight is that much stronger to make sure that I never have to go to a place and see something like that again. I was seeing people who were walking miles to go to school and the schools were about half the size of the stage up there. That school would be kindergarten to second grade. After second grade there was no education. You have to leave town to go get an education. Who is going to leave town? Who is going to walk fifty-five miles to go to school everyday? It's impossible. Experience is my best teacher and because I've experienced and seen things, my fight is just relentless — to end hunger, starvation, exploitation, abuse... everything.

### **Deirdre Lynn Hollman**

Thank you. This gentleman is an example of action, not just ideas, but action.

### **Comment**

Today made me realize what my purpose in life is and why I want to help children because they really don't have a voice in the court and I want to be able to advocate for them and to give them a voice. Not just to heal, but to love again and to be compassionate.

### **Deirdre Lynn Hollman**

All right. Congratulations on that realization.

### **Comment**

As I was sitting today listening to the speakers and watching all the students from the other schools present, it made me realize how much I personally take all the things I have for granted and how I take my parents for granted for protecting me and providing me with all the basic essentials of life. It made me want to open up myself to helping others who are less fortunate than I am and not being as selfish as I am, and I know I can be. I want to reach out to my fellow students, my classmates and let them know that there are other kids, there are other children out there who don't eat everyday, who don't eat every week, who don't have shoes, who don't have clothes, who don't have a jacket, who don't even have some kind of home to go to at night, a place to sleep even. We have to try our very best to help those students and help those kids out there who don't have those things that we have and that we complain about that aren't as big or as nice as everybody else's—we have to try and give back. We have to try and make the world a better place for everybody to live in.

**Deirdre Lynn Hollman**

It's true what she is saying because there may be people in this room who don't eat everyday and who don't have a home to go to. And, we still need to take stock in one another to the support systems that do exist and the positive people that are in your life, and I hope that you all plug into each other — the ones who are looking to make change, the ones who are looking to grow themselves and make this world a better place. But, we can start at home, like the young lady said. And, we can start right in your schools.

**Comment**

Through these presentations, it has shown us that we are so lucky and so privileged to have to go to school every single day, and have books, and have teachers that care about us; some kids don't have anything. They don't have shoes, they don't have food, they don't have clothing — and we need to realize that even though we are kids we can help other kids ourselves. You can also donate to those kids in Africa that need your help in order make sure that they have a privileged lifestyle just like us. We also need to try to not be selfish and not be superficial because there are things that we take for granted like your internet connection, your computer, or your cell phone, or your latest music, or your latest clothing. There are kids that don't know where their next meal is coming from. We need to take that seriously and help each other.

**Comment**

After watching this, I was so moved; I was touched. I feel like as a group, as a school, we should do whatever we could to help kids like that. That's all I wanted to say, thank you.

**Comment:**

Participation through experience equals a gain of opportunity.

**Comment**

It is true what everyone is saying about freedom. It is an inalienable right that no one should be deprived of. It takes more than just being told we are free; we have to be taught. You can't tell someone who is mentally a slave, you are free. School isn't doing

its job; instead of teaching students how to strive and overcome we are taught to write and repeat everything our teachers say, every time that they say it. It takes more than just repetition; it takes action.

### **Comment**

For this past week, I've been hearing a lot about human rights and all that stuff not just because I go to the school, obviously, but I'm talking about even outside of the school. Last night I attended this church with my brothers for the first time, because I'm not a church-going kid. The church was not like the average jump-up-and-say-hallelujah, praise-the-lord, clap-your-hands, Amen church. It was actually one of those black people; unity-is-power, pretty much. The bishop was talking and I was trying to do my homework while he was talking. As I was doing my homework, I was listening and he was saying things like basically every culture has this unity, which makes them higher in a way, and they all market within themselves. And marketing inside themselves brings up your economy, within your culture, which betters your people. So he was also saying that for instance the Chinese, Japanese, Asians — you never can walk into a Chinese store and see an African-American working there.

He was saying we should start uniting as a people and start upbringing our own culture; not only in Africa, we could expand and help all black people. Like the lady in the first presentation — she was saying like Afro-Latino, all of them, not just one particular African — everybody. Also, I just want to say we can't do nothing unless... Well, it starts with us. We are saying all this stuff; this is the difference between "Oh yeah, I'm feeling this way" — like one of the girls who came up and was like, "Oh yeah, I feel selfish" — and I think everybody in here to an extent can feel selfish as well. We all are given all of these opportunities and privileges and we'll come in to school and just sit down and everything the teacher says — ok, they're not hitting me and I'm not listening. And then there is a child sitting in a village playing in a puddle or something, wishing and praying that God could just send him, or her, a teacher that was willing to teach them the things they never knew about in life.

### **Deirdre Lynn Hollman**

That was lovely. That was really beautiful. You took some of my responsibility for really trying to bring this home and make it really affect your hearts.

I want to thank you all for coming but before we let you go I want all the teachers in the room to please stand up and be recognized. Thank you to all of you for seeking this opportunity for your students. Thank you to all the schools and all the young people for coming out and participating. Have a blessed day. Stay active, stay courageous and enjoy your weekend.

## **Speaker Biographies**

**Howard Dodson Jr., Executive Director, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the N.Y. Public Library**

Howard Dodson, director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library since 1984, is a specialist in African American history and a noted lecturer, educator and consultant.

Under Dodson's leadership, the Schomburg Center has developed into the world's most comprehensive public research library devoted exclusively to documenting, interpreting and publishing the literature, history and culture of the African diaspora. During his tenure, the center's collections have more than doubled and now total more than 10 million items; annual users have increased from 40,000 to more than 125,000. Two successful capital campaigns have raised more than \$41 million. In addition, the center produces and presents four to six exhibitions and 50 to 75 programs annually.

Dodson has published five books, including *Jubilee: The Emergence of African-American Culture* and *Becoming American: The African-American Journey*.

### **Victor Karunan**

**Chief, Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) Division of Policy and Practice, UNICEF-New York Adolescent Development and Participation Division of Policy and Practice**

Victor Karunan is presently chief of Adolescent Development and Participation in the Division of Policy and Practice at the UNICEF Headquarters in New York. Between 2000 and 2004, he was project officer for Participation and Partnerships with the UNICEF Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok.

He has a doctorate in the social sciences from the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands, with specialization in peasant studies and rural development in Asia. He has worked over 30 years with NGOs in South and Southeast Asia in the fields of human rights, social movements, participatory research, policy advocacy and training/capacity building. Between 1988 and 1992 he worked as the secretary general of Pax Romana, an international human rights and development NGO based in Geneva, and worked closely with the UN Human Rights Commission and helped establish the Asia Pacific Task Force on Human Rights in Geneva.

He has also taught sociology and development studies at the Asian Social Institute in Manila, the Philippines, Chulalongkorn and Mahidol Universities in Thailand and the Institute of Social Studies, the Netherlands. Between 1992 and 1995 he worked as a development evaluation consultant for European donor agencies and has conducted research, evaluation and training programs among community organizations and NGOs in many countries in South and Southeast Asia. Between 1995 and 2000 he worked as regional development advisor for Save the Children-UK Regional Office for Southeast Asia and Pacific in the fields of child rights, child labor, human resource development, participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation and policy advocacy.



Karunan is a founding and continuing board member of the Focal on the Global South — a policy research program of the Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute in Bangkok. He has been on the Advisory Board member of Child Workers in Asia — a regional network on child labor — and a resource person/adviser for the Asia Forum on Human Rights and other human rights and development NGOs in Asia and the Pacific. Presently he is a member of the Advisory Boards of the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD), the Child Rights Education for Development Professionals (CRED-PRO) in Victoria, Canada and the Children’s Studies Program and Center of the Brooklyn College, City University of New York.

**Gertrud Lenzer**

**Professor, Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center/CUNY**

**Director, Brooklyn College Children’s Studies Program and Center/CUNY**

Gertrud Lenzer is the founder and director of the Children’s Studies Program and Center, as well as a professor of sociology at both Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center. In 1991, she led Brooklyn College’s efforts to become the first academic institution to develop an interdisciplinary liberal arts Children’s Studies Program. Under her leadership, a minor in children’s studies was established in 1994, open to all liberal arts majors. In 2001, a 30-credit interdisciplinary children’s studies concentration for majors in early childhood education teacher and childhood education teacher programs was introduced in cooperation with the Brooklyn College School of Education. An interdisciplinary bachelor of arts degree in children’s studies was launched in fall 2009.

Professor Lenzer also founded the sociology of children as a new field and section of the American Sociological Association in 1991 and was designated its founding chair. She received the national 1997 Lewis Hine Award in Honor of Outstanding Service on Behalf of Children and Youth from the National Child Labor Committee, which was founded by an act of Congress in 1904. Professor Lenzer has received a number of distinguished fellowships during her career, among them the American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship; a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship in the Humanities, with a residency at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton; a fellowship at the National Humanities Center, and a research fellowship at the Rockefeller Bellagio Center, Italy. In addition she was selected as the first American scholar and the first woman to deliver the 12<sup>th</sup> Auguste Comte Memorial Lecture at the London School of Economics. Most recently, she has worked closely with legislators to spearhead legislation for an independent Office of the Child Advocate for New York.

**Presenting Schools**

**Brooklyn College Academy**

Arielle De Souza, teacher

Porscher Hoppin

Sade Samlasingh

Tadia Tiussaint

*Mission Statement:* We envision Brooklyn College Academy to be a collaborative community of leaders and learners. We believe that all students, staff and parents have unique leadership abilities which can be used to develop a positive learning environment characterized by high academic standards, equity and excellence.

### **Schomburg Center Junior Scholars Program**

Subha Ahmed  
Brittney Starne Johnson  
Geoffrey Moore Jr.  
Delvon Murray  
Bria Peronneau  
Kelsey Paul-Stubbs

*Mission Statement:* The mission of the Schomburg Center Junior Scholars program is to empower youth with the knowledge of their African cultural heritage, the black experience in America and African Diaspora history.

### **The School for Human Rights**

Shanice Blades  
Laron Costa  
Yanique Crawford  
Gabriel Johnson  
Shakwana Khan  
Tevin Maldonado  
Adrian Morris  
Angeline Pierre  
Malachi Johnson Ramsay  
Desbert Roberts

*Mission Statement:* The mission of The School for Human Rights is to develop the academic and social capacities of all our students, regardless of identity or ability. A combined middle and high school, the School offers an integrated academic and social skills-based curriculum, challenging our students to become critical thinkers and , compassionate and socially engaged young adults committed to equity, dignity and social consciousness. We are implementing a school-wide approach to human rights, teaching human rights through coursework and by building a community culture that upholds human rights principles.

## **Special Thanks and Acknowledgments**

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Participating Schools: The School for Human Rights, Brooklyn College Academy, The Frederick Douglass Academy, Cypress Hills Collegiate Prep, The Facing History School and The Schomburg Center Junior Scholars

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