Online child-led event

‘Girl human rights defenders on the frontline of COVID-19 response'

Date: Thursday 9 July starting from 3 PM Geneva – 9 AM New York time on Zoom.

Bio of the facilitator:

Mellicentia (18, Sierra Leone): She started defending girls rights at the age of 13, by joining a youth network. And for several years she has been an important voice in the Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA), a joint programme being implemented by Defence for Children – ECPAT, Plan International Nederland, Terre des Hommes and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Alliance is using lobbying activities to combat violence against girls. Setting up and supporting youth groups like Mellicentia’s is just one element of the Alliance, and, in addition to Sierra Leone, it is being done in Nepal, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Liberia and India. As a previous GAA youth advocate Mellicentia participated in discussions with politicians and journalists and spoke on behalf of other girls at the international level. In September 2018, her struggle took her to the Swiss city of Geneva, where she impressed members of the UN Child Rights Committee with an impassioned speech. So much so, apparently, that afterwards someone told her that she would not look out of place as the Secretary General of the UN.

Bios of speakers:

Hajar Yagkoubi (20, Netherlands): IBA student. As the Dutch youth representative to the UN on human rights and security, she attended last year Climate Summit and General Assembly at the epicenter of world diplomacy: the United Nations Headquarters in New York. In July 2020, Hajar and her colleague Aoife are both representing Dutch young people to make sure they will be heard at the virtual High Level Political Forum reviewing the progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, in an unprecedented context marked by a global pandemic.
Memory Banda (24, Malawi) - TBC: a tireless leader for girls’ rights around the world. She is leading Malawi’s fight to end child marriage through her work with Let Girls Lead and the Girl Empowerment Network of Malawi. When she was 18, Memory championed a successful national campaign that culminated in landmark legislation that outlawed child marriage. Memory works with girl leaders to ensure that village chiefs ban child marriage, end sexual initiation practices, enable girls to finish school and live safe from violence in a country where more than half of girls are married as children. Memory became an advocate for girls after her younger sister was forced into marriage at the age of 11. She is now a college student in Malawi.

Miatta (16, Liberia): is a girl advocate from the Bomi county in Liberia. She is passionate about girls’ rights and raising awareness on gender-based violence – especially sexual violence against girls. Miatta has been engaged in the Girls Advocacy Alliance since its inception in 2016 and has participated in many advocacy trainings. More recently she participated in consultations on the Beijing +25 anniversary and spoke on a panel to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the CRC. She is also passionate about achieving the sustainable development goals and participated in a training on SDGs and the VNR process.

Beccie (15, Scotland) first got involved in activism through a young people’s panel about Brexit, as she felt like young people’s opinions on this issue were not being heard, despite it affecting them the most. She then went on to become a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament and UK Youth Parliament, campaigning on issues such as climate change and gender inequality. She also works as a Young Advisor with the Children and Young People’s Commissioner, Scotland, to ensure that every child knows and has their rights protected. She has loved every minute of this and can’t wait to see the day where all children have their rights!
Paul (20, Ghana): youth advocate for Defence for Children International – Ghana (DCI-Ghana). His dream is to see the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals becoming a reality. He believes this can be achieved even before 2030. He joined DCI-Ghana in 2019 and has since been playing a key role in the Girls Advocacy Alliance Programme to end child marriage in Ghana. As someone who experienced child abuse, labour and other forms of violence in his childhood, he is very passionate and rationale in helping girls and vulnerable children in his country. He is currently a student at the University of Cape Coast reading Doctor of Optometry. He is a member of the United Nations Student’s Association of UCC.

Hope, (16, Scotland): Youth activist from the Orkney Islands in Scotland. Hope first got involved with activism through her local youth group which acted a bridge leading her onto other opportunities. She was very heavily involved within her local community and decided that she wanted to do more national work, she was a year of young people ambassador in 2018 and also joined a young people’s panel on Europe with Children In Scotland which looked at how issues affecting young people should be protected within the Brexit process. She then had the opportunity to become a young advisor to the children’s commissioner for Scotland.

Maria (17, Scotland), youth advocate from the Western Isles in Scotland. The reason she got involved in activism was because she saw that things needed to change on a local level and wanted to help them change. After being involved in local youth groups she decided to get involved on a national level which is when she ran for Scottish youth parliament and applied to be on the Commissioners young advisors’ group. She is now the MSYP for the Western Isles, she also works with SAMH on a youth access project and she is still in the CYPCS young advisors group. She has an interest in mental health of children and youth.