



15 February 2023

TO: COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

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SUBMISSION BY THE ARTICLE 12 AMBASSADORS FOR THE WEB RANGERS:

GENERAL COMMENT ON DRAFT GENERAL COMMENT ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

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WHO ARE WE:

1. The Web Rangers are young people from across South Africa who participate in a digital literacy programme developed, designed and implemented by Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) to allow young people to gain critical skills and knowledge about online safety.¹ The programme is focused on creating young digital citizens, who know how to use the internet responsibly and encourage their peers to do the same. We are working towards safer online spaces and combatting disinformation online. The Article 12 Working Group is made up of Web Ranger ambassadors who have been trained in digital literacy and have a special interest in policy work. All of the Article 12 members are children, ranging in age from 13 to 17 years old. Article 12 members engage in ICT-related policy submissions and discussions that ensure that their voices are heard, and opinions are considered by policymakers and industry leaders. Article 12 members work on submissions to ensure that policies and decisions that affect children are more child-friendly and relevant and relatable to children and their daily lives.
2. MMA has been working with children and building critical media and digital literacy skills since 2003. MMA has developed original and human rights-based approaches and programmes ensuring that children's right to participation is recognised and respected.² This submission was developed by working with the Article 12 group where child participation experts together with legal experts facilitated their input.

WHY ARE WE MAKING THESE SUBMISSIONS:

3. Climate change is affecting us now, will affect us in the future, and will affect future generations. We want the General Comment to guide us and our governments on how to sustain the earth.
4. We have experience in learning about the harms of online disinformation and how it affects young people. We want the world we live in to be safe and healthy, and we believe that climate disinformation that is false and harmful can change how people understand climate change. Climate change affects everyone, and disinformation about climate change affects everyone. But we, as young people, know that climate disinformation affects young people in specific ways and can change how young people learn about, understand, and respond to climate change.
5. Disinformation about climate change causes confusion and can divide young people, rather than bring us together in the fight against climate change. Being exposed to climate disinformation negatively impacts how young people are reacting to climate change.
6. We have read the Draft General Comment and are happy that the Committee has drawn attention to the fact that climate change affects us as children. However, we think the Committee needs to address online climate disinformation, as the online world is where a lot of young people spend their time and access information. We have prepared this submission to suggest to the Committee that it makes the General Comment more relatable to our lives. We believe that the General Comment will be better if it addresses issues around digital information, disinformation, and digital literacy.

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF CLIMATE MIS/DISINFORMATION:

7. We see that the Committee, in paragraph 77, has spoken about misinformation. We think it is important to distinguish between misinformation and disinformation and include both in the General Comment. We understand misinformation as the spreading of false

¹For more information see webrangers.co.za.

²For more information see www.mediamonitoringafrica.org.

information to the public without the intention of hurting them. Disinformation is creating and/or spreading false information with the intention to cause harm. We recommend that the Committee includes this distinction.

8. Climate misinformation is when someone shares false information about climate change, but they do not know that it is false, and they are not trying to cause harm. Climate disinformation is the creation and/or spreading of false information about climate change with the intention to cause harm. For example, big companies may share climate disinformation, such as false information about their products or practices (which are harmful to the environment), because they want to mislead and get people to keep using their products so they can make money or for them to justify their harmful actions. Some people may share climate disinformation because they want to change other people's beliefs. For example, they may want to convince people that climate change is not real. This is harmful because it can lead people to act in a way that is harmful to the environment. If people rely on climate disinformation, they may use resources unsustainably which will lead to the extinction of these resources which may negatively affect future generations.
9. Social media and other online spaces can be very influential and can be spaces where disinformation breeds. When disinformation about the climate is spread in these spaces young people may be influenced to continue with harmful environmental practices. Young people may also be influenced to ignore important issues like climate change.
10. Climate disinformation is also dangerous because it can change how people behave and can mislead them on how to act towards the environment. We believe that climate disinformation is dangerous because it causes people to make inaccurate decisions which may cause harm to the environment.

WHY IS ACCESS TO INFORMATION IMPORTANT FOR THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE JUSTICE:

11. We agree that the Committee sees access to information as a very important obligation for the government. Because of the importance of access to information, we think the General Comment should say more about access to information and digital literacy.
12. The right to access information is important for young people so that we know how to understand and respond to situations. If we have the correct information, we can be more aware of the consequences of our actions. The information we receive impacts our actions. This matters for climate change because the information we receive influences how we see things, how we view things, and how we act.
13. We can do better, and we can be better if we have access to accurate information. We can learn more about how to mitigate environmental harms, we can learn how to adapt to the climate, and understand how our actions can be harmful or beneficial.
14. Disinformation closes off the opportunity for us to do this.

WHAT ROLE CAN DIGITAL LITERACY PLAY:

15. Digital literacy gives young people critical skills and knowledge about the online world and how to spot mis- and disinformation. Digital literacy is the best way to deal with climate disinformation in young people's lives because it can give them the skills required to identify accurate information and inaccurate information and be able to tell the difference between the two.

16. We agree with the Committee that it is important for young people to have “accurate, updated and age- and developmentally-appropriate environmental information” and that young people “should be equipped with the skills necessary to face expected environmental challenges in life”. Digital literacy should be included in this. Our governments and our schools should make digital literacy programmes available to all young people so that we can all gain critical skills, know how to recognise climate disinformation, and help others to identify it as well.
17. Digital literacy campaigns teaching young people how to spot climate disinformation and respond to climate disinformation is a really good way for young people to be more involved in the fight against climate change.
18. Competitions about fighting climate disinformation are also a good way to create awareness and help young people have access to accurate information. It also encourages young people to be more responsible when they see and share information.

WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN WHO DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO THE INTERNET:

19. We know that not all young people have access to the internet and that disinformation can spread offline as well. It is important for all young people, including those in rural areas and those without internet access to still have access to accurate information. Governments should help by putting up posters about climate change in schools, community centres, and public libraries. Awareness about climate change can also be shared in other ways, like in newspapers and magazines and on the radio.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO SEE IN THE GENERAL COMMENT:

20. We want the Committee to recognise that young people are online a lot, and we want to see recommendations on how the government will use online spaces to share accurate information about climate change.
21. We want the Committee to include a section on the harm of climate disinformation and the dangers for young people. This should include an explanation of the difference between misinformation and disinformation.
22. We want the Committee to include a section on the importance of digital literacy, so that young people can learn how to engage with content and be able to tell the difference between what is true and what is not and be able to help their peers.
23. We want a child-friendly version of the final general comment that is fun, accessible, and exciting so that young people are interested in reading it. This is important so that young people can use the General Comment as a tool to make sure their governments are doing the right things.

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