



World Chronicle

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“World Youth Report: New Concerns”

‘Youth’ is a term refers to nearly one fifth of humanity: young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Traditionally, they have been concerned with issues such as education, employment, and access to decision-making.

But what are the new concerns of the new generation? Are governments -- and the United Nations -- paying attention? Is access to information and communication technologies becoming essential for participation in youth culture? Can there be a common ground for young people on both sides of the ‘digital divide’?

These are just some of the questions discussed in this episode of World Chronicle, with guests Julie Larsen of the UN Programme on youth (DESA) and Luis Davila Ortega, of the NGO Global Youth Action Network.

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ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

JENKINS: Hello, I'm Tony Jenkins and this is **World Chronicle**.

Youth...it's a term that refers to nearly one fifth of humanity: young people between the ages of 15 and 24.

Young people are of great interest to advertisers, trend-spotters, and the military ...yet rarely do we hear their voices and concerns expressed in the political arena.

What are the new concerns of the new generation?

Are governments -- and the United Nations -- paying attention?

Our guests in the studio are: Julie Larsen of the UN Programme on Youth, in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and Luis Davila Ortega, of the Global Youth Action Network.

Also joining us is Louis Hamann of the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, CBC*.

Welcome to **World Chronicle**.

JENKINS: Julie, your office has recently published a world survey, "The World Youth Report ". It's a thick tome nearly 400 pages long, so I hesitate to ask you to summarize it. But what does it say about the concerns of the youth of today?

LARSEN: Well, we just released the report and it's a fairly comprehensive look at the global situation of young people around the world. And it's based on the World Programme of Action for Youth, which is a sort of blue print that the United Nations General Assembly agreed on in 1995. And in that process they looked at narrowing it down to ten priority areas. And I think if anyone were to think for a moment about some of the issues that would be important to young people, they would guess a good number of these ten priorities; things like education, employment, health. But 10 years is a long time for young people and so it was developed in 1995, and a couple of years later there's some emerging issues that were also very important for young people. And so in 2003 the Economic and Social Council looked at these five new issues. And there, again that's something that you can probably guess at. I mean, who would have thought back in 1995 that things like information and communication technologies would have such profound effect on young people and their lives.

JENKINS: Alright, we'll get in to some of these details in a moment. Let me turn to Luis. What does the Global Youth Action Network do to advance the concerns of young people?

ORTEGA: Sure, Global Youth Action Network is a collaboration of youth organizations around the world. We are headquartered here in New York City, we have offices

in Brazil, in the Philippines, Lebanon and South Africa. What we try to do is participate and engage in decision making processes; try to bring the young people in and so become an incubator of partnerships. So youth organizations around the world can work together and can really foster alliances and really make a difference together as a united force.

JENKINS: You know, I recall that during the Vietnam war, there used to be a slogan that youths used, which was, “Don’t trust anybody over the age of 30”. Are young people, today, marginalized by decision makers? And if so, what can be done about it?

ORTEGA: Well, yes and no. I think one important point is that we have to work together with governments; and our network of organizations understands that, understands that we have to find constructive ways to approach governments, to approach international institutions, such as the United Nations, and find specific ways to really engage young people, and find ways that they really understand how to participate and have the know-how, and how to reach those agencies and those government institutions. So they really understand the different processes and the different ways, so they have to go about it in order to get their voices heard. But there are possibilities.

HAMANN: Julie, one of the things that your report makes very clear when you read it is that when you look at young people in developed countries and rich countries, they are doing very well. They’re more educated than ever, they’re better informed than ever, yet they are a minority when you look at the over-all number of young people in the world. So how do you sort of reconcile this disconnect that exists between young people in rich countries and young people in poor countries as you push forward this common agenda of priorities?

LARSEN: It’s definitely a challenge and I think when we talk about the Global Youth Agenda we have to recognize that disparity, I mean as you mentioned the vast majority in fact, 85% of young people live in developing countries, so that that demographic factor alone makes the very question of a global youth policy an international development issue. And I think at the same time though, recognizing that some of these concerns are going to be important to young people no matter where they live. Employment, for example. I think all young people would like to find decent employment so they can get on with their lives and branch out into other areas. So recognizing the disparity is one issue, but also recognizing that there are some things that are key to young people no matter where they live in the world.

JENKINS: Okay, let’s take a look...Luis, one of the ways in which your organization links young people is through a website called “Takingitglobal.org” which describes itself as a global on-line community. Let’s take a look at the web intro – here it is:

VIDEO ROLL-IN [TRT: 0’36”] SUB-TITLES & MUSIC ONLY.

JENKINS: Alright, that looked very hip...so that's the packaging Luis, but what about the content? What's the ultimate aim of this global on-line community?

ORTEGA: Sure, Tony this is a website that was created and maintained by the Youth Lab and technology-enabled organization based in Toronto called "Taking it Global" and this is one of the aspects and their ways they engage young people. It's a great and amazing on-line community; it offers amazing opportunities, amazing ways for young people to engage as individuals in this greater sense of an on-line community. There's a directory of organizations, there are ways to participate in projects from different areas in the world...there's a great deal of opportunities for young people to...using the internet and using ICT's to be able to engage and talk to their peers and find ways to really work on some concrete projects in the field.

JENKINS: Do you get a lot of visitors? Do you know how many hits you get on the site?

ORTEGA: Its 1.5 million hits a day.

JENKINS: A day?

ORTEGA: A day, and the community is increasing and increasing. Its thousands of young people have become members of the on-line community.

LARSEN: I think from our perspective, something like "Taking it Global" is a really useful initiative and it certainly helps our work at the United Nations in that we can rely on that community; and that young people can be really dynamic agents of change and solve some of the problems that they're facing in their societies. But, they need tools, and so "taking it Global" is one tool. It's not the only tool, there's got to be other forms of engagement, but it certainly is one tool that young people can use.

HAMANN: One of the things that struck me, if I may Luis, looking at the literature regarding the Global Youth Action Network, is some of the priorities and goals like where to find common higher ground from which to achieve effective collaboration and create synergistic results; seek to further our connection and understanding to each other. First of all, in plain English, what does that mean? And these seem to be very vague, very, you know, not very clear, if you will, goals and principles. So wouldn't it be more effective for you to focus on things very, very specifically, particularly because we all know that to get young people's attention is very difficult today?

ORTEGA: Well definitely, and I think in a nutshell, I was just trying to understand this concept of two halves working better than one. I was trying to create collaboration, creating efforts for young people in different ways to work together for their organizations or for their little groups or church groups, the after school activities to come together, and find ways to cooperate, exchange experiences and engage in direct participation, whether it's at the local

level, with their mayor or at the national level, with their ministries of education, or the global level trying to come to the United Nations as official youth delegates to the General Assembly or to the Commission on Sustainable Development or participating in the whole process leading to the World Summit of Information Society.

HAMANN: And are you finding it hard to get their attention and their interest given that they...? I mean we know that there are so many voices out there trying to cater to kids today, whether it be advertising or anything else, how difficult is it to actually get to them and say, "Here, here's an issue that you should care about"?

ORTEGA: Well, what we try to do is we actually try to poll the issues that they are interested about. We don't come up with the agendas, they come up with the agendas themselves; we're polling down through our, what we call our National Youth Agendas. We try to poll them exactly in exact issues that they really care about at the local level and try to draw those issues by putting them in touch with organizations that work in the field or trying to develop programs that cater to their specific needs.

JENKINS: Julie, is this something that has brought issues to your attention that the UN wasn't otherwise aware of?

LARSEN: I think in some ways. I mean the worst-case scenario that we would see is that governments are talking about one thing and young people are talking about the other.

JENKINS: Such as?

LARSEN: I think...I don't know Luis, I don't know if you have an example at the top of your head, I'm thinking maybe... mobility, for example, is a concern for young people; young people are very mobile today, they're moving from country to country, they want that experience. And to be honest, that's one of the issues that we're now looking at, is that migration and youth development and that interplay. So that might be one example where young people are well ahead.

JENKINS: Is this something that people had been talking about on-line, chatting about, complaining about, expressing problems about?

LARSEN: There are so many different communities; I'm taking it global that there are...

ORTEGA: Definitely. And it really depends on where these people live, where the young people live. The bottom line is that it's very important to find a place, a safe space where young people can find common ground and can share experiences or projects that have worked in their communities so they perhaps could work in other communities as well; and try to foster all this collaboration in a very open way.

JENKINS: It's interesting, you keep talking about common ground, and Luis touched on this in the first question he asked. I'm fascinated with the idea that there could be common ground between a wealthy kid living say in the United States or Britain or Canada, and a kid living on less than a dollar a day, which is the situation of a vast majority of youth in this world, in say, India, or Africa. Are there issues where they can actually have a real conversation?

ORTEGA: Definitely and we're actually working on that specific issue right now. At the local level in Sao Paulo, Brazil, we have a project that is trying to link youth that are very rich in Sao Paulo, and youth that are very poor – and trying to bring them together and try to talk to each other about the different issues that perhaps affect them both, and the different angles.

JENKINS: As for example, what kind of a subject will actually bring those two disparate groups together?

ORTEGA: Youth crime for instance, how youth crime affects the rich young kids and how youth crime affects the poor kids. And how perhaps those poor kids are being agents of crime and now perhaps delinquents and so on, and how the rich ones perhaps become delinquents for other reasons. And their different perspectives and how themselves can come up with solutions. And that's just one example, and the approach is still on going.

HAMANN: One of the things that we observed covering the world of grown-ups if you will, politics, international relations is the relationship between north and south, between rich countries and poor countries. Often times rich countries are sort of tell poor countries what they should do to get out of poverty. And poor countries look at that as a condescending way of addressing their concerns. Is this something that also that phenomenon, that dynamic, does it also exist when you're dealing with issues dealing with young people? Or is it easier, is there more of a dialogue if you will, rather than just the rich kids talking to the poor kids if you will, or talking at the poor kids?

LARSEN: I'm glad you brought that up because Luis is sort of mentioning and describing "taking it global", this idea of a safe space. And I think that's needed in some regards because young people coming into a system that's all very much set up, very much established with relationships between north and south that are already pre-disposed and they're there, so, asking you to fit into that paradigm can kind of be uncomfortable. Not to over idealize young people, but I definitely think that they do bring something to the table like they're often times the only group that I've seen sit around the table and asked, "Who's missing, who's not at the table, why are we all from say Scandinavian countries and why isn't there anyone here, why are we speaking about issues that don't necessarily affect us first hand?" So, they do certainly bring that consciousness there.

HAMANN: So, the grown-ups have something to learn from the kids actually. In a way, yes, in terms of relationships: north- south, rich- poor relationships.

JENKINS: Heaven forbid, let me just say, this is World Chronicle, and we're talking about young people making their voices heard in the world. Here's a clip from a series called, "Chat the Planet". In this episode, young people in New York link up with their peers in Capetown, South Africa to talk about "Materialism and Activism":

VIDEO ROLL-IN [TRT: 1'05"]

"CHAT THE PLANET"

YOUNG MALE 1: "I don't know if you guys know it because you are Americans but a lot of what people see about your country is its MacDonald's culture. Do you really have anything to unite behind? We've got politics and we've got power struggles, and to us it seems that Americans are a little bit dull and apathetic. No offense!"

YOUNG FEMALE 1: "I guess the question here is...how much do you think the young people in America are in alliance with the American government?"

YOUNG FEMALE 2: "I think we're really complacent in our generation, haven't seen that we can make a change..."

YOUNG MALE 2: "We don't know who our senator is, we don't know who our councilwoman is, we don't know... and a lot of us don't care".

YOUNG FEMALE 3: "You guys have lived through the most important change that's happened in the past 25 years... and I'd be curious to hear what you did to end apartheid?"

YOUNG FEMALE 4 (OFF-CAMERA): "We were in the grip of this violence and this activism. It was constantly a part of our lives..."

YOUNG FEMALE 5: "So we all grew up as activists, basically.

YOUNG FEMALE 6: "Like you guys had the Civil Rights Movement, young people united, they fought for something...we had apartheid, we united, we fought for something..."

VIDEO OUT

JENKINS: Well, I hate to sound like an old gray beard, but 30 years ago, at the height of the Cold War, we used to see massive demonstrations by youth in the developed world, in Britain, in France, in Canada, in the United States. And friends of my generation often complain that the youth of today is not active. How unfair are they when they target the United States, like the American youths, and say that they are apathetic?

LARSEN: I think one of the things that jumped out at me from that clip is when a young person says, “I feel no connection to the powers that be”. Maybe its less of an age thing and just more of a not having access to decision makers, or not feeling that a voice will be heard. And so I think it’s not that young people care less, I think they have less channels or they feel that they have less channels to express their concerns and their ideas about how they’d like to see things change. So, I definitely believe that young people are still very much engaged in the issues, and I think a lot of times they’re doing work behind the scenes; and there’s some incredible community projects that are taking place due to youth efforts. But what really has to be addressed is their inclusion in decision-making, and I think when they are included, when they do feel that they will be listened to that...not just in the outcomes of the project or policy... but actually right at the beginning stages, I think they will become more involved and we’ve seen it.

HAMANN: On that point Luis, I mean when we look at over the last 15, 20 years, I mean youth organizations – organizations trying to voice the concerns of young people - haven’t been very effective, very...sort of never really had a voice on the block if you will. What makes you think that your outfit is going to be different? Is there something that’s changed? Is it the technology that makes it easier for people maybe to get their voice out there. What is it that will make this one different?

ORTEGA: Yes, the technology is one aspect, but I think the important point is that: there’s a new way to approach young people, it’s innovative because it tries to foster collaboration, it doesn’t try to politicize youth issues, but it tries to bring the best out of young people, and their organizations, that they are able to create at the local level to truly make a difference and to try to link up, just as those young people in South Africa and in New York did, to find common ground and find experiences that they could share and could better the whole process of obtaining solutions at the local level. For instance, this whole idea of young people not being involved as much as 30 years ago – well, that’s not necessarily true; young people have continued to be involved, they continue to protest, but at the same time what happens is that...and that’s where we worked with a company that produces this show “Next Next Entertainment” because we’ve acknowledged that we need the media, we need media outlets to put our voices out there as young people; because youth crime has gone down tremendously in the past decade, but the media doesn’t acknowledge that and the levels of violence put on the media on young people committing crimes actually increased tremendously, much more than the actual crimes. And in the way it has descended, in statistics, so it’s just...we’ve acknowledged that we have to work with the media to make sure

that youth voices are heard and that young people are able to communicate and portray their actual successes and the way they are really impacting on their communities.

JENKINS: It sounds like you are more mature than my generation. We didn't feel particularly connected to the powers that be; we were busy throwing rotten tomatoes at them. I don't think we were any closer to them. I think we were just as divorced back then as today. But it seems to me that what you are saying is that direct actions, we used to call it "marching and demonstrating, throwing rotten tomatoes", perhaps isn't the best way to achieve what you're after. You sound an awful lot more sophisticated, I have to say...

ORTEGA: I don't know, I think it's a strong aspect because we cannot...I mean, throughout the years there's just no outlet that young people have been able to use, to really demonstrate and to show their concerns. But we also have to be smart but how to approach the powers that be and how to get things done and how to accomplish things and we have to work within the system, and we have to work with governments and help reform governments, help reform international institutions that perhaps have not catered to young people because they don't know how to. And perhaps we as young organized people come to them and offer them solutions and offer them ways to really get there, and really approach young people...that the whole paradigm of how these institutions work will change.

LARSEN: I think, picking up on what Luis said, I think in the last 10 years it's fair to acknowledge that there's been a huge recognition that young people do have a role to play. They are critical to the decision making process and particularly if the outcomes are going to be meaningful, and so even with the United Nations system, you will be hard pressed to find an agency or a programme that doesn't have some sort of youth structure that will start working with young people. The question that Luis raises is interesting because the issue is now how. We recognize that we do need to work with youth, but the house still needs a lot of work. How do you engage young people that may be very different from those that are in authority?

JENKINS: How, meaning how does the United Nations engage them?

LARSEN: Absolutely. Yeah.

HAMANN: And do you think that this engaging process is more than just words on paper, or words from UN officials? Or do you actually see it happening?

LARSEN: It is... it is happening. I'm pleased to say it's happening here at the United Nations. We've got to start looking more at it being less of a blue print and more of principle. So we've got some good ways that are working but we need to recognize that it's not a one-size-fits-all, and depending on which...I mean, youth is not an entity in and of itself either, there are definitely different sub-cultures and different sub-groups then, depending on who you're

working with, you're going to have to adopt that. So, I think we're moving in that direction and we, you know...I can't wait to see what's going to be coming out of it... from different programmes and agencies.

JENKINS: Of course, one way that youth could get the attention of politicians would be to exercise their right to the vote, and of course, we know that in throughout the world, this is one area I think where there isn't a division. In the developed world and in the developing world, youths tend not to use their vote. Is that something that you are working on?

ORTEGA: Yes, and we've worked on it here in the United States and we're trying to work on our web partners. Other initiatives in Europe are taking place right now, well soon enough, the European parliament elections are taking place...and young people are trying to get organized.

JENKINS: Why do you think they haven't been? Is it because they don't think it's worth it - that nobody is going to listen to them anyway? It's a waste of time. Or is it simply that they're not engaged, that politics if you like, goes over the head and all they're all interested in is...in rap music and sports, or something?

ORTEGA: I think that the important part is that there hasn't been that linkage of how all these policies matter to them, and when organizations come, youth organizations come and present in a friendly way how the old decisions taken by decision makers affect their daily lives and how they can participate, then things are going to start to change...and things are starting to change now. Because, my organization for one is starting to try to accomplish that, to try and engage the common young person in the street, and try to... not limit this to a club or interested young people that march or that participate in UN meetings, but try to reach schools or reach communities that perhaps they have an interest in issues, but they haven't found the way to express those issues, and reach the powers that be again.

JENKINS: Another area, one thing that I hear from youths a lot in this country is that one area that they're really concern about is the environment. And there's a feeling that old people just don't get it. I actually know a teenager who tells me that he thinks that if policies don't change, the human species will be wiped out in 50 years, that he will never get to see his grandchildren. Is that something that unites youths around the world? Is that something that there is a real concern?

ORTEGA: Definitely. Actually young people have been collaborating in issues relating to the environment since the '70s, since Stockholm, and coming to Rio in '92, Johannesburg in 2002. Young people really feel strongly about the environment and it caused them to participate in UN processes and that's one of the spaces where young people have been

actually more engaged at the UN, which is the Commission on Sustainable Development, which deals directly with sustainable development.

JENKINS: And do you feel that you'd been listened to it, people hearing your concerns there?

ORTEGA: I think so. It's one of the best practices of how the UN actually listens to the young people.

HAMANN: How do you get the young people to care about, because you know, one thing about young people is their very self-centered. It's all about them, I mean, very much like adults in a way. How do you get them to care about something that's going on 10,000 miles away or you know, across the world when you know, they're only worried about what's next, what's next on television? I mean, how do you get them engaged or how do you get them interested, or how do you get them to care about issues that don't particularly pertain to them personally, but that pertains to youths in general?

LARSEN: I don't know, I think I'm going to challenge you there on that whole idea of young people being self-centered, because in fact I think they're one of the first to raise questions about, well what's happening across the ocean, and what's going on in other places, and again what Luis said is really critical in linking it to their own lives; so the fact is that, and one of the new issues that we look at in the report is globalization. I mean the global is local, and so things that are happening in the world are affecting their immediate circle, their friends, their... what's on TV, and critical concerns to them. So I think they can make the connection.

JENKINS: Wait, hang on a minute Louis because we don't have much time left and I've been staring at this book you've got in front of you, Julie, all through the show. It says "tool kit". Can you tell us something about that? What is that?

LARSEN: Well, as I mentioned the World Programme of Action on Youth is, are reaching its 10th year anniversary and that's a...like I thought a very long time for young people. So we are in process of review and we want to do that by engaging young people directly, so this is the tool kit that they can use to do just that: to work with their governments, to find out how far we've come, and how far we still have to go?

JENKINS: Is there a way of checking with the governments and the politicians to see if they're actually doing more than delivering rhetoric?

LARSEN: Absolutely. Exactly, it's a perfect way to start a dialogue between the UN, governments and youths themselves.

HAMANN: One issue in particular that you would say is overriding in terms of concerns of young people all across the world; If there is one issue that you have to take?

LARSEN: I'm going to go back to that being fully involved in decision making because it runs through just about every concern that's in the book. And it's about young people having a say in the matters that affect them.

JENKINS: Now that's a perfect place to stop.

Thank you all for being with us on this special edition of **World Chronicle**, dedicated to the concerns of young people.

Joining in the studio were: Julie Larsen of the UN Programme on Youth, Luis Davila Ortega of Global Youth Action Network, and Louis Hamann of the CBC.

I'm Tony Jenkins. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

ANNOUNCER: Electronic transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by contacting World Chronicle at the address on your screen:

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