

# **DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUTH THROUGH EDUCATION: A FOCUS ON THE ROLE OF SELF-TEACHING AND PLAY**

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## **HEARING BEFORE THE TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTEENTH CONGRESS**

**FIRST SESSION**

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**JUNE 28, 2017**

TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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*Co-chairman*

JAMES P. McGOVERN, Massachusetts,  
*Co-chairman*

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# **DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUTH THROUGH EDUCATION: A FOCUS ON THE ROLE OF SELF-TEACHING AND PLAY**

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**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28, 2017**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,  
*Washington, D.C.*

*The Commission met, pursuant to call, at 2:08 p.m., in Room 2255, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Randy Hultgren [co-chairman of the Commission] presiding.*

Mr. HULTGREN: Good afternoon. Welcome. Sorry for a little bit of a delay. Thank you for your flexibility. The good news is votes are done for a while, so now we can follow through on the hearing all the way through, so that is a good thing.

Welcome to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's hearing on how global innovation and technology are strengthening the rights of children and youth through education. Our witnesses today have traveled, many, from very long distances, from Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Toronto, originally Turkey, and so grateful to have you all here in town as well. I would like to thank you for taking time to share your expertise with us on a very important subject.

The work of human rights is, at times, discouraging, because we seek to shine a spotlight on mass violations taking place around the world. But today, our desire is to highlight some of the most positive, important developments in the field. In the midst of deprivation and oppression, there are organizations implementing revolutionary ideas that are strengthening the rights of millions of youth around the globe whose lives are besieged by repression, war, and poverty.

Of those affected by human rights abuses, children are often the world's most vulnerable demographic. They comprise more than 50 percent of the world's refugee population. UNICEF maintains that deprivation of education fuels cycles of inequality that undermines the potential of individuals and societies.

Humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises currently disrupt the education of over 75 million children in 35 crisis-affected countries. In these countries, over 17 million school-age children are refugees, approximately half of which attend primary school and less than a quarter of which attend secondary school.

Girls in crisis-affected countries suffer disproportionately, as they are 2-1/2 times more likely to be out of school than boys.

Global technology companies, NGOs, and individual entrepreneurs are developing original creative solutions that are responding to children and youth in these crisis-affected areas and empowering communities to teach the fundamentals of developing, such as sharing, collaboration, and inquiry.

Innovative ideas allow people within these contexts to access the knowledge needed to foster holistic development strategies and to advocate for their own rights and needs. The United States is often involved in these efforts by identifying private sector entities to implement aid through grants and also by establishing public-private partnerships that are characterized by joint planning and resource contributions. The United States must continue to utilize these partnerships, along with cutting edge technology, to strengthen the rights of vulnerable populations.

Today, we have invited a distinguished company of experts who are working directly at the intersection of human rights and innovative education strategies for youth. I look forward to hearing how these strategies are providing solutions to some of the world's most intractable problems and how the United States' policy can best strengthen these kinds of efforts.

So again, thank you all for being here. And it is my privilege to recognize the co-chairman.

[The prepared statement of Co-Chair Hultgren follows]

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE RANDY HULTGREN, A  
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS AND  
CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

**TLHRC Hearing – Defending the Rights of Children through Education  
2255 Rayburn**

Introductory Remarks of the Honorable Randy Hultgren (IL-14) | June 28, 2017

- Good afternoon and welcome to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's hearing on how global innovation and technology are strengthening the rights of children and youth through education.

- Our witnesses today have traveled from Illinois, Massachusetts, New York and Toronto. I would like to thank them very much for coming here to share their expertise with us.
- The work of human rights is at times discouraging because we seek to shine a spotlight on mass violations taking place around the world, but today our desire is to highlight some of the most positive and important developments in the field.
- In the midst of deprivation and oppression, there are organizations implementing revolutionary ideas that are strengthening the rights of millions of youth around the globe whose lives are besieged by repression, war and poverty.
- Of those affected by human rights abuses, children are often the world's most vulnerable demographic. They comprise more than 50 percent of the world refugee population.
- UNICEF maintains that deprivation of education fuels cycles of inequality that undermines the potential of individuals and societies.
- Humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises currently disrupt the education of over 75 million children in 35 crisis-affected countries.
- In these countries, over 17 million school-aged children are refugees, approximately half of which attend primary school and less than a quarter of which attend secondary school. Girls in crisis-affected countries suffer disproportionately, as they are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys.
- Global technology companies, NGOs and individual entrepreneurs are developing original, creative solutions that are responding to children and youth in these crisis-affected areas by empowering communities to teach the fundamentals of development such as sharing, collaboration, and inquiry.
- Innovative ideas allow people within these contexts to access the knowledge needed to foster holistic development strategies and to advocate for their own needs and rights.

- The United States is often involved in these efforts by identifying private sector entities to implement aid through grants, and also by establishing public-private partnerships that are characterized by joint planning and resource contributions.
- The United States must continue to utilize these partnerships, along with cutting edge technology, to strengthen the rights of vulnerable populations.
- Today, we have invited a distinguished company of experts who are working directly at the intersection of human rights and innovative education strategies for youth.

I look forward to hearing how these strategies are providing solutions to some of the world's most intractable problems, and how United States policy can best strengthen these kinds of efforts.



Mr. MCGOVERN: Well, thank you very much. And I join my esteemed colleague and commission co-chair, Randy Hultgren, in welcoming all of you here today, the distinguished witnesses, to this hearing on defending the rights of vulnerable children through education and play.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that, and I quote, "everyone has a right to education," end quote. And that, quote, "education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. And it shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial, or religious groups," end quote.

These ideas are reiterated and elaborated in the international Convention on the Rights of the Child. These are lofty ideals under normal circumstances. They are enormously more difficult to achieve for the most vulnerable of children, those affected by natural disasters like earthquakes or floods, or caught in armed conflicts, or those who have been forced to flee their homes due to violence or persecution.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises currently disrupt the education of over 75 million children in some 35 crisis-affected countries, and that is an astonishing number.

As a father and a brother of two public schoolteachers in Worcester, Massachusetts, I know how important education is. I hear about it all the time. It lays the groundwork for people's lives. It informs our social, political, and economic participation. Education can be incredibly empowering, and it is tragic when children miss out on learning because of circumstances entirely beyond their control.

The thing about kids is they grow up fast. But the crises and conflicts that are depriving children of their access to education can take a very, very long time to sort out. The conflicts in Burma, Sudan, Colombia, and Syria come to mind. So we need to find ways to educate, even when there are massive disruptions in kids' lives, and we don't have time to lose.

This challenge is the reason we are here today. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses today and learning about their experiences. I am especially interested in the lessons from those experiences, the best practices that they have identified. I would like to hear what difference it makes to use a rights-based approach in developing innovative educational models. And I would like to understand how a child's right to education intersects with other rights, especially the right to food.

You know, food security can be both a cause and a consequence of violence and conflict, and hungry kids have a hard time learning. So how is that link being addressed?

So I want to thank you again for being here today. And I yield back my time.

[The prepared statement of Co-Chair McGovern follows]

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JAMES P. McGOVERN, A  
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF  
MASSACHUSETTS AND CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE TOM LANTOS HUMAN  
RIGHTS COMMISSION**



**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing**

**Defending the Rights of Vulnerable Children and Youth  
through Education: A Focus on the Role of Self-Teaching in  
Play**

**June 28, 2017**

**1:30 – 3:00 PM**

**2255 Rayburn House Office Building**

**Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery**

Good afternoon. I join my esteemed colleague and Commission Co-Chair Randy Hultgren in welcoming you and our distinguished witnesses to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing on defending the rights of vulnerable children through education and play.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to education,” that “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms,” and that “It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups.” These ideas are reiterated and elaborated in the international Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These are lofty ideals under normal circumstances. They are enormously more difficult to achieve for the most vulnerable of children – those affected by natural disasters like earthquakes or floods, or caught in armed conflicts, or who have been forced to flee their homes due to violence or persecution. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund, UNICEF, humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises currently disrupt the education of over 75 million children in some 35 crisis-affected countries. That is an astonishing number.

As a father, and the brother of two public school teachers, I know how important education is. It lays the groundwork for people’s lives; it informs our social, political and economic participation. Education can be incredibly empowering, and it is tragic when children miss out on learning because of circumstances entirely beyond their control.

The thing about kids is that they grow up fast. But the crises and conflicts that are depriving children of their access to education can take a very long time to sort out – the conflicts in Burma, Sudan, Colombia and Syria come to mind. So we need to find ways to educate even when there are massive disruptions in kids’ lives, and we don’t have time to lose.

This challenge is the reason we are here today. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses today, and learning about their experiences. I am especially interested in the lessons from those experiences – the best practices they’ve identified. I would like to hear what difference it makes to use a rights-based approach in developing innovative educational models.

And I would like to understand how a child’s right to education intersects with other rights, especially the right to food. Food insecurity can be both a cause and a consequence of violence and conflict, and hungry kids have a hard time learning. How is that link being addressed?

Thank you again and I yield back my time.

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Mr. HULTGREN: Thank you to my co-chairman.

We have two great panels that are going to be presenting for us today. First, I am grateful to have Christopher Fabian with us. He is a technologist who cofounded UNICEF's Innovation Unit in 2006 with Erica Kochi. He currently is the principal advisor to UNICEF Ventures, a team which looks at emerging technologies in the service of positive global change. In 2015, he led the launch of UNICEF's venture fund, the first fund of its kind in the United Nations, which invests in early stage frontier technology, like drones and UAVs, data science and machine learning, and digital and cryptocurrency.

The Innovation Fund, which was \$11.2 million, has made over 30 investments in 26 countries. Chris's teams have worked on infrastructure platforms for low infrastructure environments, including award winning work on RapidPro, an SMS-based information system with more than 3.5 million active users in 35 countries.

Chris is currently focused on scaling UNICEF's work on data science and drones. UNICEF Ventures has invested in Magic Box, an open source data analytics platform that combines data engineering from companies like Amadeus, IBM, Google, Telefonica and others to produce insights in new scientific methods that help organize and make better real-time decisions.

Chris lectures and has also been recognized in 2013 as one of Time magazine's 100 most influential people.

Chris, great to have you here. Thank you for your work, and look forward to hearing your testimony.

Can you turn on your microphone, please?

#### **STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER FABIAN, SENIOR ADVISOR ON INNOVATION, UNICEF**

Mr. FABIAN: There we go. How about that?

Thank you to our co-chairs, to Representatives McGovern and Hultgren. And it is always impressive to hear the work that UNICEF does and the statistics that we talk about from other people. So thank you also for that opening, because I think it frames the conversation really well.

And I think that there is a possibility to talk about some positivity in the world. I wanted to sort of frame it in a larger and, hopefully, not too existential question about what is coming in the future and how we can use some of the technologies that you mentioned in the opening, Representative Hultgren, to maybe alleviate this

inequity that we see opening up in front of us as UNICEF.

Jack Ma, the founder of Alibaba, said something interesting about a month ago. And he said the future of humanity during the next 30 years is filled with more suffering and pain than it is with joy. And he said that as a reflection, actually, on technology, on the trends of technology in terms of automation and job loss that we are going to see, on the movement of people to cities, and all of these debilitating kind of secondhand effects of a technological revolution that is coming and how it can possibly open up more inequity than it solves.

And I think that is important for UNICEF, as a 70-year-old organization, with a focus on equity, on ensuring that the children in the bottom quintile of income have the same access to opportunity and choice as everybody else does. We have this new field opening up in front of us, which is a digital and a technological field of equity, which is something we don't have that much experience in.

UNICEF, obviously, has offices in 130 countries. We have 12,000 staff working, 88 percent of them in the field, and really working on solving those issues at that bottom quintile level. And when I joined UNICEF, I came from the private sector in technology, I didn't know that much about the organization, but what I did know was its vast reach. And I think that is important as we look at the problems that we see kind of opening up in front of us.

In the space of disasters and emergencies and the effects on children, there are a few areas that we are learning about as an organization. There are 55 million kids who are on the move because of violence. And it is not a number that is getting smaller.

I was lucky enough to be in Germany last week, in Hamburg, where they have some of the best refugee integration programs in the world. And nobody thinks that this number will shrink over the next few years. So there are issues like that, like you have got 55 million kids with no sovereign government to represent them. And UNICEF, as an organization that was built 70 years ago, is built to deal with sovereign governments.

You have a ministry of education, a ministry of health in a country, and that is who we deal with. You have statistics that come from a ministry of data, science, statistics and so on. And that doesn't exist if you are one of the 55 million kids on the move. That is for us, that is an existential question. How do we adapt to that world?

We are also in a world where you have got about 500 million kids who are at risk of not getting the right food and nutrition, because either there is too much water on their land or there is not enough. And that is not a situation that we were built to deal with either. And as you said, that there is a direct link between lack of early childhood nutrition and educational outcomes.

And we know, and we have proven over the last few years at UNICEF, that not only do you have physical stunting where a child's body doesn't grow physically, but if a kid doesn't get the right mix of nutrients in the first few years of their life, their brain also doesn't develop full cognitive capacity, which means that you have a country like Malawi, where you have got 60 percent stunting. That means that 60 percent of the kids in Malawi will not be able to solve the problems that the generations before all of us have laid out in front of them. That just will not be a cognitive ability.

We have diseases that are spreading faster than ever. And we have also the problem that, in the education institutions that we work with, we are often not teaching skills for the future. So if you look at a country like Malawi, there are about 18 million people in Malawi right now, 50 percent of them are under 25. That number will go to 40 million people in the next 20 years. The main economic driver is a coal factory that is being built, which no matter how big you build that factory, it will not provide jobs or access to opportunity for the number of young people who will need it. And that is a struggle for us, because as we have built our education systems and our ways of working with learning, we have built towards a future which no longer exists.

And Tony, like, asked me, we were talking about education recently, and he said, Chris, I think you are missing the point. He said, instead of teaching kids the skills they need for jobs, we need to start thinking about how to teach them for a future without employment. And I think I would actually just present that as a challenge for us to discuss today, because, to me, it worries me a lot. And how do we look at a future? There is a great op-ed by Kai-Fu Lee in the Times this weekend, this Sunday, that talked about what job loss will come from artificial intelligence and automation and how the brunt of that will be borne by poorer countries where there is a large number of jobs right now that are held by manufacturing industries that will be gone.

I am sure you have a 1.5 million truck drivers in the U.S. that are going to not have a job. But in countries that provide most of their workforce with labor opportunities through kind of basic automatable tasks, the effect will be devastating. That is all the depressing stuff, and the jokes come later.

UNICEF is lucky, I think, to be able to see this changing world and to be able to interact with the actors and create a space for equity within it. We do work with -- as was mentioned in the beginning, we work with partners like Google, like Amadeus and Telefonica who are able to give us a sense of the world that they see. And if you talk to a big technology company right now, they also see this world of automation, but they see a world of data. And it is not -- that is another thing that is unfamiliar for us as a legacy organization.

There are more people on Facebook. There are now 2 billion people on Facebook. There are more people on Facebook than there are in China. There are more people on Tencent, on all the apps and chat apps in Tencent, than there are in India. And these companies, these mega companies are now providing services that were being provided by sovereign governments.

Facebook knows who you are. Facebook knows if you are going to break up with somebody 2 weeks before you break up with them. Scary fact. Do you hear the nervous laughter behind me? It is because you are clicking on people's photos and you are having different attractions. They are gathering all that data. And the pair of shoes that you looked at follows you around online. That identity -- if you have 250 friends on Facebook, you meet a basic set of know your customer requirements as well as you do, you know, in most bank basic KYC checks, which is only kind of a -- anyway, we won't talk about banks and their KYC requirements.

The ability for a company to provide something like identify, to provide cash transfer, to provide education, those are services that we as humans are used to working with a government to negotiate. And now to we see these corporations that are doing that. So we have a set of opportunities, I think, in front of us that can help us bridge the gap between these awful possible futures and the needs of children around the world. And I would like to highlight maybe three areas where we as UNICEF have looked at technology instead of seeing how we can bridge what might be a widening gap.

One of them is a clear realization that if you can't count things, you don't know what is happening, and you don't know where to direct services, and UNICEF has done that with nutrition in the past. I am sort of carrying this around. This a MUAC band, a mid-upper arm circumference monitor band. This is a band for looking at the upper arm circumference of a kid. Between zero and five their upper arm stays pretty much the same. So you wrap this around a 5-year-old's arm, and if they are a healthy, well-nourished little kid, it is in the green. A healthy, happy kid, moderately malnourished is in the yellow. And a severely malnourished kid is in the red. So that is what the upper-arm circumference of a malnourished 5-year-old looks like, which is just tiny. And this is a fantastic tool that was developed in the 1970s and 1980s for gathering data on nutrition, but it doesn't connect very well to the internet. And that data isn't available in realtime. So while this can help diagnose something immediately, it can't necessarily tell us what is happening in realtime in a situation of famine.

We think that there are tools that can do that, that can point to those needs. We are working on a project using facial recognition and some of the most advanced artificial intelligence to do this same thing by looking at a kid's facial features. And you can see a body mass index from a person by looking at their face, and you can do that with a kid as well. So what if we could turn the ability to do this, one kid at a -- it is really hard to weigh a 3-year-old and to measure them vertically because they

wiggle a lot and they are all over the place. But what if you could take a photo of 100 kids and see who needed immediate care? And that is the type of intervention that technology allows us to do.

But to extend that one step further and say that if we are thinking about nutrition only as calories, you know, 1,500 calories per day gives you a pretty healthy person, what is our information diet? What is our information poverty as well that we need to work on? And I think these issues are applicable -- and the solutions to them are applicable in the U.S. as well as elsewhere. But how many kilobytes per day does a kid need to be informationally nutritive, to have a sense of their possibilities and their future? And how many of those kilobytes are kind of Kardashian kilobytes? How many of them are Wikipedia kilobytes? How much do you need to be able to right back those kilobytes? And it is the same thing with food. You can have as much cake as you want, but that doesn't necessarily make you a healthy kid.

And UNICEF is looking at how we can understand both kids' physical and nutritional status more quickly, but also their informational nutritional mixture. And we are working with partners of ours. We have got a project to map every school in the world that we are working on with Project Connect, which comes out of the satellite manufacturer OneWeb. And if we know where schools are, we can do a bunch of things. First of all, we can direct satellite connectivity to those schools. We can also direct food to those schools.

I was in Kenya 1-1/2 months ago, and there is a famine in northern Kenya. And often when we send school for school feeding, we don't know exactly where the school is. A country may know where 30 percent of its schools are, but not exactly, and they say it is in that direction, somewhere in that district. If you know exactly where something is, you can create the logistics networks that you need to optimize a supply chain and direct food. And so that is a set of work that we are doing under the kind of guise of information poverty.

A second leading on from that is the work around data and data science. It is clear to us that in the world where Facebook knows everything about you and Google knows even more, we can use that data for good as well. During the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, we were able to use the information coming from our partners about where people were moving in order to predict where a disease would spread. We replicated this with Zika recently, and the results that came out of our team mirrored the results that CDC produced on Zika cases in the U.S. But our team's data science work came out about 4 months earlier, which means that by using people's mobility, by looking at where people are traveling, if their -- because diseases travel where people travel -- you can actually get ahead of things. So in a world where disease is spread more quickly than ever, we are actually able to see where people are moving and position our messaging and our health centers in a way that optimizes the small number of resources that we have.



And I think that is applicable in the case of refugees as well. If you are a Syrian kid who is traveling through Europe and you have no number that identifies you, you maybe have five different sovereign registrations as you go from country to country between Syria and maybe Germany, and you fill out the same form over and over again. The form is filled out for you in many cases. If you are a 14- or 15-year-old Syrian, though, you do have one number that sticks with you the whole time. And it is not your phone number, because you switch out your SIM card in every country. It is your WhatsApp number. And it is the number that you signed up for in Aleppo or in Damascus, and that number lets you connect with your friends and family on the refugee trail. And that is important.

My mom came to the U.S. as a refugee in the late 1940s, and they had almost no ability to connect to their family, the Polish family that was here when they arrived. For a Syrian kid in Europe, that WhatsApp number is a life line to their family and to resources. And that is a tool that we as UNICEF have that just wasn't available 10 years ago, if we know how to use it.

And finally, I just would highlight a little bit of the work that is being done on specifically the space of learning. And I don't quite know the answer to Jack Ma's provocation of what do we do in this dark next 30 years. We have been very impressed with some of the work that Norway has led on in getting crowdsourced and kind of community built solutions to education and learning problems. There is a game called taghdhiat alwahsh, Feed the Monster, that the Government of Norway created through a set of partnerships that teaches basic literacy and numeracy to kids through a basic phone. And it is a fun game. You can play it. You can learn Arabic. If you are a 5-year-old, you can learn it much more quickly than I can. And you can play it on your phone as you are on the move. And having that access to continuity and to some sense of achievement does a lot to create a sense of possibility and opportunity for you.

We have been also very excited by the work that is being done on vocational training in emergencies. If you go to Zaatari camp in Jordan, now you will see youth centers where young people are being trained, not in specific vocational skills, but in the skills before those, the creative skills, the playful skills, and the cognitive skills that you need to collaborate in a world where we don't know what jobs will exist for them. A lot of that work is being pushed by the UNICEF offices there with our partners, by the Ryan foundation, Declan Ryan has been very involved in looking at the next generation of skills for young people. And when you see kids do that sort of abstract creative work, it opens up a bit of light into this dark future.

And then, finally, back to this question of information. We have seen the ability of young people to report on their own needs and tell us what they need, rather than us thinking we know. And anybody who has -- who was a teacher -- I am a reformed teacher. Anybody who was a teacher or has teachers in the family knows that, most of the time, kids know pretty well what they need to learn, they just might

not be able to express it exactly in the way that an administrative education or a school board wants to hear.

UNICEF has developed platforms like U-report, and U-report is a system that lets a kid text in, send a text message, and we can aggregate those messages in realtime. We have about 3 million U-reporters in 25 countries. And when we send a message out to them, we can see what they are saying. These are young people, and it is all a free message for them. We can see what they are saying in realtime.

In Liberia last year, we heard that there were cases of sexual violence in schools, that teachers were asking for sex in return for final grades. We sent out a message -- we were working with the minister of education, and she was ready to move on this if she just knew where. Like, in what district was it worse? Because you can't send investigators to every school. We sent out a message to about 70,000 kids in Liberia over text, is sexual violence a problem in your schools? We immediately got results back. From 70,000, we got results back from 13,000 kids in 10 minutes. Of those 13,000, 11,000 of them said -- that is 80 percent, 82 percent of the respondents said that the sex for grades was, in fact, a problem in their school. And you could see it in realtime on a map of Liberia. You could see where the problem was the most pronounced.

That led us to work with the ministry to set up help lines, but also to set up the operational responses that we can do if we have that information in realtime. So that was both police and legislative work that happened within days. And if you imagine the ability of a lawmaker to make laws based on that type of information and that sentiment in conversation with young people, that is a very different world.

The way that we have tried to explore some of these new areas is through the Venture fund. And this is a new vehicle in UNICEF. It allows us to make bets on technologies that we don't understand fully, that are emerging, and that we think will hold great value for the organization.

Yesterday, we were talking with the World Bank about blockchain. And every time I think I understand cryptocurrency, I know how little I know. But it is clear to us that the ability to have this distributed ledger which stores something, like a child's educational results in an anonymous and encrypted way with permanence could be applied to refugees. And we are funding a small project in South Africa that is doing just that.

And these types of bets through the venture fund at the \$50,000 to 100,000 level aren't something that our organization would usually do. UNICEF isn't -- I wouldn't describe it as a risk positive organization. We are an old bureaucracy that works in that kind of way of making sure that our choices are sort of checked off on by everybody. And that is how a bureaucracy works anyway.

In order to work with the future that is coming that is more uncertain than ever, we need some vehicle to open up a bit of risk, and the fund let's us do that. We have tests going on in Malawi now for using drones to provide WiFi, and the first drones flew this morning out of Kasungu air field. Those drones will drop WiFi to places like potentially to refugee camps where WiFi doesn't exist or isn't consistent in its coverage to allow young people to access the types of information that I have described. And building those types of opportunities in Malawi is interesting because, not only does it solve a local problem, it also brings young Malawian entrepreneurs together to work on technologies that aren't the coal factory. And in fact, we had the first Malawian paraglider come to UNICEF 3, 4 weeks ago. His name is Godfrey, he is 25 years, and he is a paraglider and a drone pilot. And if you want to hear somebody talk about how much drones and aviation engineering can change a country, Godfrey is the guy to do it. And what he said is that if this can become a way to bring big companies, the companies that we as UNICEF have access to, to a place that is as difficult to work in as northern Malawi, and to solve problems there, it can not only solve those problems immediately, but create a cohort of young people who are thinking very differently about the future that is to come.

So I just wanted to present the work that our team is doing, that our organization is doing. I think it is a great opportunity to open this discussion up, both nationally and in international areas that we are working in, and I am happy to answer any questions for you.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Fabian follows]

## **PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER FABIAN**

**Statement from Christopher Fabian  
Senior Advisor on Innovation, UNICEF Office of Innovation**

**Defending the Rights of Vulnerable Children and Youth through Education: A  
Focus on the Role of Self-Teaching and Play**

**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

**June 28, 2017**

I would like to thank the co-chairs, Representative Randy Hultgren and Representative Jim McGovern, for holding this important and timely hearing, and for inviting UNICEF to testify.

As you know, for 70 years UNICEF has worked to save and improve the lives of children and families. We work in education, protection, health, nutrition, water and sanitation;

we operate in both development and humanitarian contexts. In partnership with the United States, UNICEF has saved more children's lives than any organization in the world.

UNICEF has long approached its work through the lens of innovation – whether this was the child survival revolution of the 1980's to the work that the organization has done around creating fair and optimized supply chains for essential medicines and vaccines.

It is also an organization that has changed many times, and is, again, undergoing a profound set of changes – in many cases driven by the technology that we see causing shifts in the world around us.

As UNICEF shapes itself to a world where we see significant impacts on the wellbeing of children coming from threats like a broken environment, increased violence and movement of populations, and a labor force that is, globally, unprepared for the challenges of automation, we are looking both to our origins and our partners for inspiration.

Equity is in UNICEF's DNA. For us, this means ensuring rights and options for the world's most vulnerable children.

Equity, for UNICEF, means building services for the hardest-to-reach first – and using the logic of business, research, and development to ensure that the lessons learned from those difficult places can be scaled globally.

Our partners, increasingly in the corporate sphere, are also realizing that there is a need to do business differently. Gaps in information, opportunity, and choice are damaging not only to the world's most vulnerable, but to their core consumers and their employees.

Around the world, growing gaps between rich and poor are creating damaging, even dangerous, social, political and even economic emergencies. [Jack Ma]

Investments in the health, education, and protection of the most disadvantaged children help to reverse a vicious intergenerational cycle of poverty into a virtuous cycle. By giving today's disadvantaged children a fair chance in life, they can compete fairly as adults and help grow their economies and stabilize their societies.

UNICEF needs to look towards new areas, as well, where these gaps are growing more pronounced [pandemics, learning, nutrition, jobs, refugees].

In these emerging inequities, traditional solutions will not serve us. We know that tools that have been at hand for many years, our traditional survey instruments and technologies, will not give us the answers we need quickly enough.

And we know that the technologies that we have used – vaccines, a simple tape for measuring a child's upper arm, the Mark II hand pump – are incredibly powerful, but need to be deployed faster, better, and more efficiently.

How are we reaching the most disadvantaged? First, data. We can't reach them if we don't know who and where they are.

Around 290 million children – 1/3 of children globally -- are not registered at birth; they're hard to find. With no legal identity, they're denied access to formal schooling, the right to vote, healthcare and, for girls, proof that they're under the legal age to be married. They're also more vulnerable in emergencies.

New technologies and innovative use of existing technologies are helping us to register children quickly and inexpensively.

For example, Uganda had one of the lowest rates of birth registration in eastern and southern Africa. Five years ago, only 25% of Ugandan children had birth certificates. Over the last several years, UNICEF and the government of Uganda have used mobile phones, with simple, open-source technology, to create national birth registrations. Now more than 70% of Ugandan children get birth certificates, and that number is still increasing.

Similar systems are being rolled out in Tanzania, Mozambique, and elsewhere.

Just as we have to collect data like birth certification in real-time, so we need to work on so-called 'information poverty.' In other words: when individuals and communities don't have access to the correct information -- how to prevent Ebola spreading; when to vaccinate a child; what to feed a baby -- it can limit their opportunity, choice and wellbeing. So, the sooner we can assess a community's level of 'information poverty,' we can use that information for advocacy and action with partners.

In order to assess information poverty, and fix it, we need to know where it is most severe. We are working with a new NGO, Project Connect, to map every school in the world, and understand their access to connectivity in real-time. For many schools, this access will be non-existent. Partners like OneWeb, Google, and mobile operators will work with us to use that mapping to better target their services – and ensure that the information that they provide is relevant to the communities who receive it.

Humans often work with less data than they should. Data is particularly valuable to UNICEF, both in emergency response and also in our ongoing development work. We've been able to work with private sector partners like Google, IBM, Amadeus and others to collect their data, aggregate it, and use it to understand how diseases are moving or where are the most vulnerable children might be.

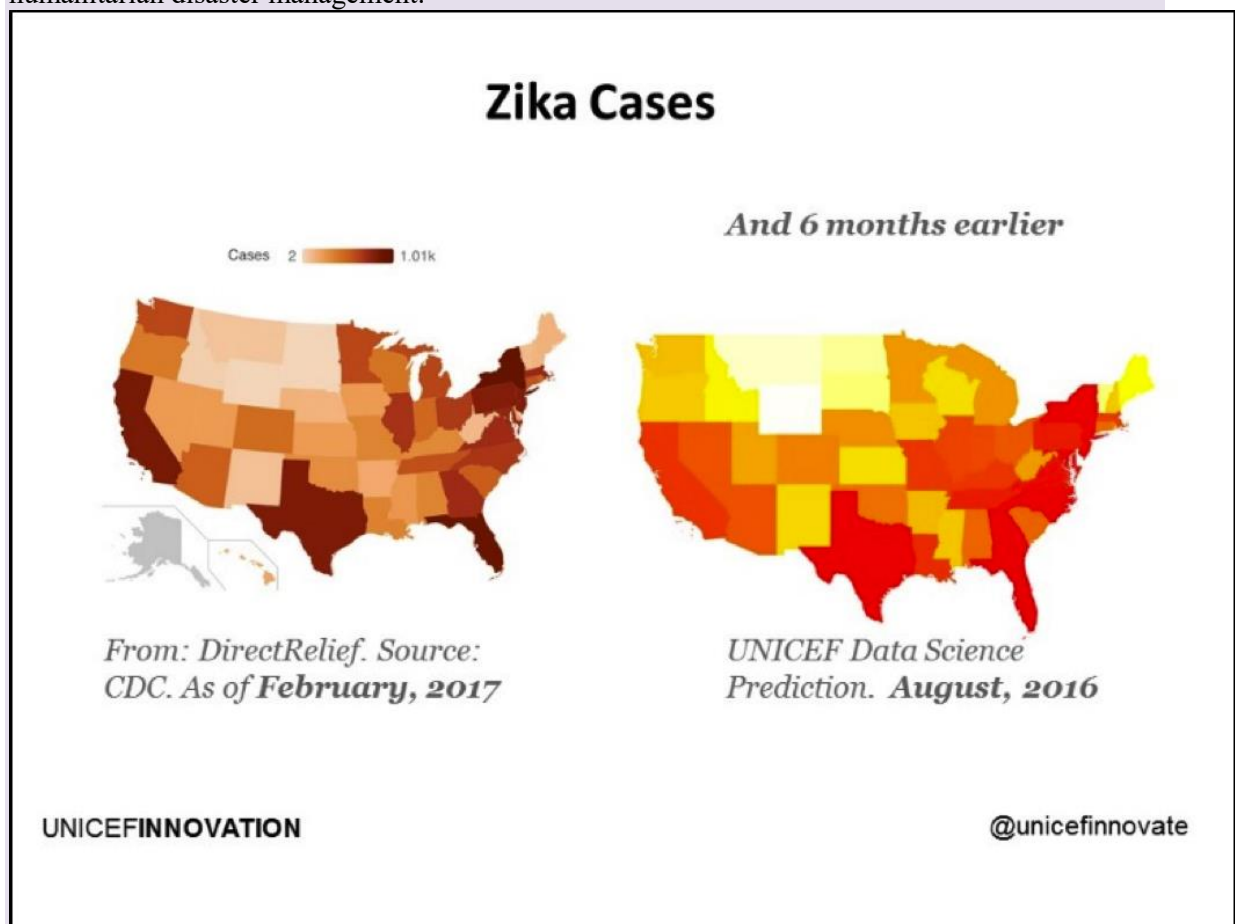
During the Ebola epidemic, we used data from mobile network operators to understand where populations were moving. This type of realization can help us more correctly

target where we would put a health center or where we would broadcast certain vital information

We were able to use real-time data as well in the Zika epidemic where we work with partners to understand mobility, and also to use data about poverty to understand which communities might be most vulnerable.

#### More detail on UNICEF's Data Science

Data partnership (acquisition) and analysis platform to allow UNICEF to use real-time information for better programming, policy, and emergency response. This platform (working name: "Magic Box") has been mentioned in the [Telefonica white paper](#), Data for Good as “the most advanced initiative working towards an operational real-time system to support humanitarian disaster management.”



Platform is up and preliminary test shows the capability to predict where mosquito borne diseases are travelling by combining various data sources (see attached map of exogenous Zika cases in the US and 6-month earlier predictive map generated by Magic Box platform).

Partnerships established with Telefonica, Amadeus, AT&T, IBM, Telenor, Bloomberg, Google, and Facebook - with making contributions of data, expertise, and funding and was presented at the Barcelona Mobile World Congress.

Such action can build better access to services - as is happening in Brazil's distance learning program in the Amazon; create better information flows for government -- as we did with EduTrack in Sierra Leone to track school supply delivery during and after Ebola; or build more responsive services -- U-Report --that allow young people to have a voice and link that voice to action.

That means putting communities at the heart of solutions. Enabling them to participate. Creating loops where their voices can not only be heard, but turned to practical issues that are of interest to the entire community to solve.

U-Report is a simple, low-cost, system that enables real-time communication between young people throughout a country and decision-makers. It works over SMS on a basic mobile phone. It also has an app for smartphone users, and connects to Twitter and other social platforms. More than 3 million young people in 25 countries voicing their opinion on disease outbreaks and teacher shortages to insufficient supplies in community healthcare centers. Young people become not only recipients of services but architects of their futures.

With partners, we used U-Report to help stop a banana plague in Uganda. We texted: "Do you see yellow leaves on your banana trees?" With the responses, we built a map of the disease in real time so the Government could better target aid efforts.

In Nigeria, we used U-Report to identify whether or not youth know their HIV status. We put out this poll in December of last year and received over 120,000 responses telling us yes/no.

These answers informed our campaign, and will allow us to build more targeted responses, as we did with our HIV/AIDS counselling platform on U-Report, in Zambia, in 2012, where more than 70,000 young people got access to information about how to get voluntarily tested, resulting in a doubling of youth who accessed voluntary testing services.

A decade ago, many such solutions would have been impossible. Now we need to keep thinking of what will be possible.

We're asking questions such as: what role can Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAVs) play in delivering essential services – such as taking photos from above or mapping or surveying infrastructure damage after emergencies. And how will new technologies like 3D printing or ubiquitous connectivity change the way UNICEF works

Technologies like drones allow us to access new opportunities that would have previously been impossible. In the space of UAVs and drones UNICEF has created two corridors for testing new technology: one in Malawi and one in Vanuatu. These corridors are spaces for physical testing of this new technology and for learning about what skills pilots need and what types of services are most needed on the ground.

In Vanuatu, drones will be tested for the delivery of vaccines. In a country where distances between islands mean a delay in delivering vaccines and these delays can risk the temperature of medicine, drones can provide a quick and easy way to build a national supply chain.

When we bring in private sector partners to explore how these technologies can be used they do so under a framework that both protect civilian populations and also ensures that we learn from the results of their tests. Finally, companies that are testing their drones are responsible for training young engineers and entrepreneurs from these countries.

Last year, 2016, was one of the worst on record for children. Today, more than 55 million children are on the move because of war or violence. It's often on those 'terrible journeys' that UNICEF can have a significant impact – thanks to partners in the telecoms industry.

One of the most terrible journeys for children today is the refugee and migrant route out of Syria and Iraq into Europe. More than one in three of those on the move is a child.

Many of the refugees arriving in Europe have smartphones. Increasingly, they're using them to access information about where they are, where they can go, and what services are available.

"e-Learning Sudan" provides basic literacy and numeracy skills in Arabic. We collaborated with War Child Holland and it was built in Sudan. In 2016, it was awarded EURO 5 million by the Dutch Dream Fund for use in the migrant and refugee crisis.

"E-ta3m el Wahish" or "Feed the Monster" is a game that was recently developed in collaboration with the Government of Norway. This game teaches Arabic literacy and basic word skills to refugee children, and will be adapted into other languages in the coming months.

Kolbri, an online learning and open education platform, first built in our Innovation Lab in South Sudan by partners from Khan Academy Lite, recently was awarded approximately 5 million USD by Google.org and is currently being adapted to be used in learning centers in Greece, East Africa, and the Middle East.

All these services -- tech hubs, counting and monitoring, e-learning – can be applied to almost any emergency. Earthquake or Ebola, conflict or tsunami, partnerships with the telecoms sector can help us reach children faster, equip them information, reunite them with loved ones, and respond with vital services.



It's important to consider how we invest in these products. UNICEF's innovation venture fund is the first vehicle of its kind in the United Nations. The venture fund allows us to make \$50-\$100,000 investment in early stage tech startups.

**The Venture Fund** is an \$11 million fund, making \$50,000-100,000 investments in early stage, open-source technology with the first year setup including systems building (research, experimentation, de-risking for year two, network building; and the second year (2017) investing in a larger set of companies. To date, there have been innovation investments in 27 country offices and 5 investments in start-ups.

UNICEF built the team that is needed to properly make and support investments, including the initial 5 companies that we invested in. The Venture Fund site (alpha version) is up and running at <https://unicefinnovationfund.org/>. The Fund will be making 2nd round of ~10-15 investments, and UNICEF is conducting targeted discussions in programme countries with the start-up / VC community to identify and source start-ups in markets like Egypt, Indonesia, and China.

With continued U.S. Government support, and in partnership with U.S. companies and nonprofits, we can truly reach every child. Thank you again for the opportunity to share UNICEF's Innovation work with you today.

Mr. HULTGREN: I'm sorry, just figuring out scheduling. I have got a group that I am hosting of Swedish diplomats that are talking about innovation as well. So I have got to run to say hello to them in a few minutes. But I just want to make sure my co-chairman could be available.

I am just going to ask a couple of questions and then hand it over to him so I can run up and say hi real quickly. But, first of all, thank you. Thanks for your work.

I mean, so many thoughts come flooding into my mind as you are testifying, but one is just the power of the change that is going on right now, power for good. I mean, so much opportunity, but also power for disruption and some real challenges that we are going to face through that.

To me, so much of my passion for the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission is finding out what we can do as Members of Congress to have an impact for people who need help, who need someone to be a voice for them or to help maybe get information out about them; those who kind of feel like they are getting lost or left behind. So I guess, to me, the fundamental question is, what can we do? What can we bring to our colleagues, 433 other colleagues here in the House, 100 over on the Senate side, reaching out to the administration? What do you think government's role ought to be in some of the challenges that we are facing?

One of things that UNICEF is doing well that we can just come along and cheer, and one of the things that maybe you need help with, I am encouraged by some of the companies that you are working with, amazing companies. But I know they have got limitations as well or only interest maybe in certain parts of this. So what do you think we can be -- should be doing, need to be doing? Where can we have the best impact with limited time and limited resources too, but wanting to do good for as many as we can around the world, especially with this powerful technological advances that open up many opportunities but also bring many new challenges?

Mr. FABIAN: Thank you. I think there is probably a book in the answer to that question somewhere to be written.

Mr. HULTGREN: Let me know when you write it. Okay? And I would like a signed copy.

Mr. FABIAN: When they let me take a vacation.

I think that there is some very simple things. One of the most important things that we see as we engage with our partners is to make the point that these are not problems for people far away, that the future is a problem for everybody. And when we are building up systems like Magic Box that look at data and information flows, that can help understand where Zika is going to move in the U.S., as well as it can, you know, Ebola in Sierra Leone. And I think that making -- the resonance of the

future felt here is something that you can do and your colleagues can do.

The second is to keep a firm finger on this idea of information equity and technological equity; that it is very possible that in 15 years we end up with two worlds, a world of people who are very lucky to have access to everything and the world of people who just do not. And that is a dangerous world to live in. And you can see the beginnings of it all over. So I think making sure that, as we work with companies, we push them a little bit and say, you as a major social network are great at getting your message across to the top two quintiles, but who is working on getting it to that bottom one. And what they will say is, well, that is not where our money is. That is not where our -- and you say, sure, but your money also isn't inequity. And it is a very dangerous world that you create. So how do we make a kind of business argument for that? And I think that is another valuable thing that can happen here.

The third thing is we are always happy to have more collaborators, whether it is in, you know, ringing a bell for the work that is being done in the field, in UNICEF country offices, or convening some of these partners together. So I think showing -- you know, I am very lucky and honored to be here today, but I am presenting the work of 12,000 people, and showing the work that is being done in some of the most difficult parts of world in a way that is palatable and accessible to companies and to other partners is also an important role that can be played here in D.C.

Mr. HULTGREN: Thank you. That is very helpful. I am going to ask one more, if that is okay, and then I am going to hand it over to my co-chairman.

But I wondered if you could -- I think one of our greatest challenges in this place is volume of information, just the challenge of just keeping up, being able to stay on top of all of our committee work and bills and other things like that. So I get it, you know, that myself and my colleagues are overwhelmed. You know, we talk about drinking from the firehose, and we feel that like that every day. But I do think this is important, and so I would just ask maybe if there is one or two things that you are most excited about with either UNICEF or with technological changes that we can share with our colleagues and maybe one or two things that scare you to death.

And I know you talked a little bit about it, like just some of the malnutrition. And I would say with that measuring thing that I don't think Jim and I want you to do it on our biceps. Maybe Jim, not me. But it is sobering, boy, when you see just the reality of malnutrition and the real impact physically, but also mentally and the challenges there. So anyhow, I wonder if you could just, from your experience, from kind of the top of your thinking of one story, one thing that you say, this is so exciting, everybody in Congress needs to know about this, and this is so sobering, everybody in Congress needs to know about this.

Mr. FABIAN: Yeah. I mean, I think that, you know, we had a meeting with

our management team and the new head of UNDP last week, and Tony Lake, our executive director, highlighted information poverty as something that is both timely and important to work on together. I think it is an exciting ability to be able to quantify the type of access to information that a young person has and look at, if you could only give 14-year-old anywhere in the world one gigabyte of information and that was it, in their whole life you can just give them one flash drive, and they could somehow magically read it, what would be on that?

Having that type of information allows us to work here in the U.S. and places that are less connected, where people have less access to services, and we can better understand what services are needed. But it also allows us to understand how to uplift an entire population or group who might not have access to connectivity. So I think that that is an easy concept. It is kind of expressible in a sentence and it is kilobytes of data per person for day, just like calories. And it is something that we can work on together as a global good. I think that is an important thing.

The thing that scares me the most is -- I think is what I said a minute ago, if we don't act together and act quickly, we will end up living in a world that is fine for some of us, and I think it is very dangerous to live in a world that is fine for some of us and horrible for others. The ability to create bubbles -- and if you look at where job loss will happen, it won't happen in big cities. Big cities are going to be fine, big urban areas anywhere in the world. It will happen in semiurban and rural places. That bubble that we create is going to be one of the most dangerous things for humanity anywhere. And not understanding that changing world in a world that starts to look a little bit post sovereign where companies control access to services, access to identity, will really put us on the back foot. And if we have a chess board and if humanity keeps backing itself, and we had 64 squares to start, maybe we are at that last row now, I am not sure that we have much space to move backwards anymore.

So I think that taking a stand that this is about a connected world and a world where inequality and inequity anywhere affects everybody is another simple and sort of resounding narrative that we can tell together.

Mr. HULTGREN: That's great, very helpful. Thank you so much.

I am going to yield to my co-chairman and excuse myself. I will be right back.

Mr. McGOVERN: Well, thank you very much. And I appreciate the work of UNICEF and the UNICEF Innovation Unit. My friend Marty Rendon is here. I appreciate all the great people and all the wonderful work that you do on so many issues. And this is a very profound, big discussion.

And, you know, I have long believed that we ought to -- that education, you know, is not only right for everybody on this planet, but we have to make sure that we actually ensure that everybody gets an education, because in the developing world,

there is no future if you have a population that is illiterate, that doesn't know how to operate the most basic technology. But I have also learned along the way that education in and of itself is not enough, because if you don't have enough to eat, then you can't learn. And so you can have all the drones flying all around that you want and all the high-technology equipment you can muster to try to get education into peoples's hands, if they are hungry, they don't learn.

And so we have been trying to expand this discussion in a more holistic way. These are all the different pieces that need to be in place for -- in this case, you know, for what you are doing to actually work. And I think, you know, you talked about the future. I mean, you have got to come to the wrong place in some respects, unfortunately, because Congress is not very good about thinking in terms of the future. We react, you know, and that is a real problem. I always joke with you and say, Hillary Clinton likes to say it takes a village. I say it takes a plan. I mean, there is just not a lot of plans out there, you know, that actually are dedicated to like ending hunger or dedicated to universal education. And there is, you know, all these great companies, as you mentioned, that are investing in new technologies, and all these great startups going on in various places in the world, including in places, you know, where there is a lot of conflict and where people are refugees.

But I guess my question is, you know, the scalability of all of this and the sustainability of all of this. And it is hard for me to see that without the United States and the world community saying, okay, we are going to put some resources on the table. I mean, we get it. And, you know, we think this is not only the right thing to do morally, but from a national security point of view, as you mention. I mean, if we have two different worlds, you know, it can be a pretty scary place. I think we are getting to that point, but, you know, this is every bit as important as investing in more military hardware to send to some country.

I mean, what is the buy-in from the developed world have to be from the wealthier nations? I mean, to do this right, to avoid the very dark scenario that you alluded to, what does it mean? And how do we get administrations and the international community, you know, to say, okay, here is the plan, let's argue on how we are going to fund it, but here is the plan?

Mr. FABIAN: I think that in order to create a plan, we need to really look at some of the fundamental assumptions that exist and be brave enough to question them.

I was in eastern Uganda a few years ago, and we were driving and there is a town called Moroto. We were driving outside of that town on the way back, and there were a few people panning for gold. And I can -- you know, growing up with this romantic notion of 49ers and, you know, panning for gold and that whole thing. And it is actually not a very awesome thing to do it turns out. So we stopped the car and we said, let's talk to these people. And we met a young woman, she was about 16.

Her name was Lucy, and she was panning for gold. And I didn't know what language she would speak, if it would be Kiswahili or a Ugandan language or English. She spoke a little bit of Kiswahili and also the local language.

And so I was asking through the interpreter, like, so what does gold look like when you find it? How much do you make? She said I make about the equivalent of \$10 a month. Sixteen years old. And I said, so what does gold look like when you find it? And she said, it looks like seashells. And I thought there is no ocean anywhere near Karamoja. She learned that in a school somewhere. She went to a school for long enough to learn that analogy and that metaphor of a seashell, and she is panning for gold in the dirt for \$10 a month.

And the fundamental thing that we are thinking is we have to get build more schools and get more teachers and do this thing and expand it and expand it. And I don't think we sometimes stop to look in the mirror and see what the skills are that we are teaching.

For the developed -- and I am not sure about, you know, the phrasing of developed and developing, but for rich countries to look in the mirror is also a difficult thing. And for us to understand in Europe or in the U.S. where the holes in our education system are and where are the spaces where we need to create space for creativity and compassion and collaboration, rather than some of the hard skills that are being taught, isn't just an issue for other places, it is an issue here. And I don't know how to make a global plan for that, but I think that that is one thing that needs to happen.

The second is we tend to be a world of export, in general, of export of ideas and Silicon Valley is going to have the next great idea from Malawi and so on or Geneva is going to fix the problem in South Sudan, and I think we need to flip that. You know, UNICEF was built also in this world of verticality, and if we start to turn that a little bit and look at a world where we invest in solutions in the places that are the most difficult to work in, I think we create a stronger network of solutions. The constraints are more difficult to work within, but the stuff that comes out is often better. And I will give an example of that.

In South Sudan, right before this last long-term conflict started, we had a group of engineers from Khan Academy, the online learning platform. And they had called us up and they said, hey, we are interested in developing our platform further. This is Khan Academy. It is cool and it lets you, you know, watch a video and do your lessons, and it is great in the U.S. We said, can we use this for UNICEF? And we said, well, maybe, but why don't you fly up to Juba to our innovation lab and why don't you build a piece of software there? Okay. And these guys got on the plane and they were out in Juba, you know, 2 weeks later. And there you are getting internet, you know, an hour a day or something. And they built the next version of software with South Sudanese engineers and with teachers. And they built something that was

robust and strong and worked there. The thing that they brought from Silicon Valley failed immediately. By building something locally, they built something that can then scale up. And that platform that they built in South Sudan is now being used in refugee centers in Greece, and it is going to be scaled up in the Middle East as well.

And so I think that by investing in local solutions, investing in the creation of options locally, even though it is more expensive at the beginning, we create better sets of solutions than if we tried to create one thing and send it out from the U.S., for example. And that is very much baked into UNICEF's equity approach.

Mr. McGOVERN: I think that is a great approach. I mean, you know, I have done a lot of work on the issue of school feeding. I travel to countries where I would go into villages and I would ask young people like, you know, what is school like. And they tell me they don't go to school. And, why not? Well, you know, either because there is no school in the neighborhood or in the area, or if you are a girl in some of these countries I visited, it is not so important. And so it is more important for you to, in some of these areas, for them to work on the farm or whatever.

And, you know, so we helped develop this program called the McGovern-Dole school feeding program -- not me McGovern, but George McGovern, and Bob Dole. But what we learned is one glove doesn't fit all. All right. So it has to be local. So it can't be a program designed in Washington and say, okay, here is the model of school feeding program for everybody, go do it. No. Everybody is different and everything is different.

And the other part of this initiative was to make it self-sustaining so that the community buys into it and, basically, owns it and doesn't have to rely on a U.S. subsidy or U.S. food for it to continue. And we learned that little things like, you know -- not only more girls go to school, but sometimes you get even more people to go to school if you give the kids a snack to bring home. All these little innovative things. We learned that, you know, more girls went to school and there was pressures, you know, on the local citizens to build bathrooms. I mean, just things that we don't always think about here in Washington.

But I guess the point is, kind of what you are saying, is that, look, I mean, education in one community, what is appropriate for an education curriculum in one community may not be necessarily a good fit for another community. And you need to develop it locally because people who live in these places are going to know what their future is, and it may not be what we think it is. It may be, you know -- I mean, they may know better than we do what will work. So I get all that.

I guess I just -- you know, I want to -- I mean, I am really intrigued by all this. I am just trying to think how we make it all work and how do we have a happy ending here and what has to happen? But, I mean, how scalable are the education-related startups that you have identified? I mean, I just, you know -- I mean, have you seen

positive models for private -- public-private partnerships, you know, as a means to increase scalability? I mean, do the countries buy in to them? I mean, what happens in these refugee camps where there is, you know -- where we are not dealing with countries where -- I mean, how do we -- the one thing I was --

And I will end with this and I will get your response, but a couple of years ago, I was in Gaziantep in Turkey with Senator Tim Kaine. And we were meeting with some of the people, headed up programs to deal with the incoming refugees from Syria. And there were all these little neat programs that we get to see, all very, very impressive. But I will never forget, one of the leaders in the community said to us, our biggest worry is education. Our biggest worry is that there is no schools for these kids to go to, and some of them are, you know, like 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 years old. And, you know, and we are worried that the time it is going to take for you to figure out the solution is going to be so long that they will be 25 years old. And, you know, we are going to lose this generation, who will not only not be, you know, productive in terms of solving problems, but might be the problem. And so I am just trying to think how do we ensure that whatever seems to work stays and grows?

Mr. FABIAN: On this trip to Germany I met a very smart 28 -- 29-year-old Syrian engineer. And he was doing an apprenticeship at a firm in Hamburg, a freight forwarding firm. And they had been incredibly open about opening up these apprenticeships to refugees. And he said -- you know, we started talking, and at the end of the panel discussion he said, I have to say, it is great to be an apprentice here and I am so grateful for it, but I did this all before. I did this when I was 18. And he was, like, it is wonderful. I am so lucky. Don't take this the wrong way. I am so lucky to have this opportunity, but I was an apprentice already. I have been through that, and now I have just lost a decade of my life. And I don't know that there is a really happy ending. So I don't know that this story that we are living in right now has a really glowing kind of end at any point. I think there are less devastating endings.

One of the things that we have seen scale is the ability to teach people to work together and to create sort of these entrepreneurial collaborative skill sets that don't exist in formal education. So there is a platform that we worked on called UPSHIFT. UPSHIFT started in Kosovo in our Innovation lab there. And in Kosovo, we worked with this group of kids who, when the first time we took them into a shopping mall, they all took off their shoes. And they were from the poorest parts of Kosovo. They were too afraid to get the floor dirty by tracking dirt on it, they took their shoes off on the outside of the shopping mall. And imagine going for a job interview at 17. You have never been in an office. Eighty-five percent of kids in Kosovo going for job interviews had not been in an office building before.

That platform is about how you get kids to interact and to get them to have that same sense of opportunity that like a startup pitch day has here. It is scaled to Montenegro. It is now being used in Myanmar, in Vietnam, and in Lebanon. It is a set of protocols for how you train for that type of optionality. I think that is good, I



don't think that is good enough.

The second thing is we need data. We don't have a good set of data about any of these needs. We have census data and stuff that is 5 or 6 years old, but we don't have the real-time data about what people need in these most difficult circumstances. And so that is why I was talking a lot about data science. And I think we need to be better at knowing what populations need before something happens. So what is it that a bunch of refugees in Germany need? The Syrian refugees are going to have different sets of needs than the Afghan ones, but we don't have realtime way to hear about that. And if we don't have that, then we are providing a block of education to people and it is not necessarily right for both groups. So I think that a big investment in data science is also important.

And finally, we need to be able to pay for these services in a way that is accountable and transparent. We are investing in a company, this blockchain company that I partially understand in South Africa -- I totally understand it, it is one of our investments. Of course we know what is going on there. They are both paying teachers, paying early childhood development centers through the blockchain, through the Bitcoin blockchain, but also registering kids through a separate blockchain. And that allows them to have transparency and accountability, we hope. This is an investment so we will see, you know how well it works. But to have transparency from bank account to payment of teacher and from student's record in school to student's graduation. And that type of transparency is something very new as well. So I think there are some bright spots, but they really have to do with data, I think, and some of these technologies and the ability to scale that staff faster than the problems are scaling.

Mr. McGOVERN: Well, I appreciate it. And I -- look, this is all fascinating and so important. I would just echo something that the co-chair said. I mean, for here, we need to find ways to be -- you have to help us identify specific ways to be supportive, because this is like See Spot Run here in Congress. I mean, it is like -- because, I mean, I think we need to figure out ways, you know, of concrete things that we can do to help be a little bit of wind at your back on this, because I think everything you said is absolutely right. I mean, if we are going to provide education, it has to be relevant to the community you are dealing with.

But we need to make sure the people all over the world get the basics and have access to education. You know, we are grappling with some of the same issues you are talking about internationally here right in the United States. In my own community that I represent, the communities I represent, we are talking about these same questions. But I thank you very much for your testimony.

Mr. HULTGREN: Thank you so much, Christopher. We really appreciate your work. And please pass our thanks along to your colleagues at UNICEF as well. We really appreciate it.

We are going to transition to the second panel now, if that is all right.

Mr. HULTGREN: Welcome. Thank you so much for being here. I am so grateful to have Christopher's input, but really looking forward to hearing yours as well. And I think maybe some more fun, good encouraging things that are happening, and we need both here. We need to realize the sober reality of challenges we are facing, but also be encouraged by some really good things that are happening.

So it is my privilege to introduce our next three panelists. First, Denny Johnson. Denny Johnson is founder and chairman of the board of Kids Around the World, which is headquartered in Rockford, Illinois. The NGO was founded in 1994, and has built over 650 playgrounds around the globe in 64 countries. Over 500 volunteers help install 125 playgrounds just this year. Locations target difficult areas of refugee camps in Iraq, in Lebanon, and other sites include Peru, Ecuador, Haiti, Swaziland, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and many other places, North Korea, others.

Feeding the poor is also a focus. Today, Kids Around the World has packed and shipped over 20 million meals for children who are desperate for proper nourishment, to learn and grow. Thirty-four hundred teachers have been trained so far this year on the use of oral methods of storytelling in churches and schools worldwide.

Also, off the record, Denny is a great personal friend, one of my dad's best friends. So great to have you here, Denny. And I really do respect you and appreciate your work.

Lindsay Groves is the vice president for program development and evaluation at Right to Play. Lindsay joined Right to Play headquarters in Toronto, Canada, in 2008. Since that time, she has overseen complex multicountry, multiregional partnerships. In her time with Right to Play, Lindsay has traveled and worked with Right to Play offices, civil society partners, governments, and multilateral agencies in Lebanon, Jordan, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, Mozambique, Tanzania, Ghana, and Liberia. Lindsay now oversees Right to Play's program development and evaluation team, which includes leading global program partnerships, global policy, advocacy global program development, monitoring evaluation and learning, and our North American programming.

Last but not least, Hakan Habip is here as well. He is a father and a hacker. He has studied mathematics and management science. In 26 years of professional life, he worked in corporate sales, distribution, manufacturing, and international finance. In 2000, he came across Concepts of Positive Change, and has been a missionary for them ever since. Since 2004, he has been organizing scientific tournaments in Turkey for students between the age of 6 and 19. He is the founding co-chairperson of Science Heroes Association, a Turkish nonprofit. SHA volunteers

have reached 17,000 students from 45 cities. Mr. Habip was selected as a change maker by the Sabanci Foundation in 2013. Based on these experiences, Mr. Habip has given two TEDx Talk speeches and wrote an article, "A holistic model to empower humanity." He believes his approaches can help build sustainable peace in some of the most volatile parts of world.

I first had the chance to meet him in St. Louis at the world championship robotics, FIRST robotics world championship, just a little over a year ago. And I am grateful that you could be with us, all of you, grateful.

I am going to recognize Denny Johnson first to give your testimony. Thank you.

**STATEMENTS OF DENNY JOHNSON, FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN, KIDS AROUND THE WORLD; LINDSAY GROVES, VICE-PRESIDENT, PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION, RIGHT TO PLAY INTERNATIONAL; AND HAKAN HABIP, FOUNDER, SCIENCE HEROES ASSOCIATION**

**STATEMENT OF DENNY JOHNSON, FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN, KIDS AROUND THE WORLD**

Mr. JOHNSON: Thank you very much. I really appreciate the invitation to be here today and to represent Kids Around the World and to talk about the important issue about education and play. My thanks to the Commission's Co-Chairman Hultgren and also McGovern. We really appreciate you taking on this awesome task and chairing this Commission that I think is very important to have heard and learn new things.

And I appreciate Christopher's testimony, very interesting and very informative. I thought he did just a great job. And it might be a little bit hard to follow Christopher as number two, but my hat's off to UNICEF and the great job that they are doing.

Play actually really plays into education. Some surveys have been done in Japan and China which shows that if an hour is set aside for education, it would be good that if the kids played for actually 5 or 10 minutes unsupervised before they began to learn for another 50 minutes, so the kids learn better if they had an opportunity to play and to get the serotonin working in their brains. They were more receptive and able to learn as a result. So play is important.

Kids Around the World exists to bring hope to kids that are living especially in challenging circumstances. Our programs are focused on leveraged play, nutrition, and also in training teachers as well. We base our training for teachers on the oral method, because we know that 75 percent of the world learns orally, they don't learn by books, they learn because they heard stories or are able to tell stories. And so we

try to encourage the teacher to do a great job in telling stories in their educational process.

To date, we have built 650 playgrounds, as you mentioned, in 64 different countries, 50 of them actually in the United States because sometimes they say, are you doing anything for the kids in the U.S.? And yes, we are.

Our organization has shipped over 20 million meals to kids and trained thousands of teachers. I think we have trained about 3,400 teachers so far this year, and the number of meals that we will do this year will be over 2 million meals that will be packed by various organizations, churches, and other groups.

Our playgrounds, park districts all over America are changing out their playgrounds for new ones. This has required some requirements because of the insurance or liability, but they are getting rid of the old playgrounds. And what the problem is is that they are taking these playgrounds, the old playgrounds, and putting them in the dumps, which is filling up our landfills.

And we try to say there is another way to use those playgrounds. We will take them. And they call us and ask us to come and get them. And so we send out a volunteer crew that goes and takes those playgrounds, brings them back to Rockford, Illinois, or our offices in California, and we refurbish them. And we use volunteers, students that are struggling with their life issues, plus local prisoners, in some cases, and even addicts in recovery. And they help us repaint the playgrounds, put new bushings on, put new seats on, put new slides on if necessary, and then prepare them to go and be shipped all over the world.

Play effects and playgrounds effect on kids. Play teaches kids fundamental social values of skills, conflict resolution on the playground. And I think we have all learned that as we grew up. They learn fairness, trust collaboration, and they even learn leadership. Somebody says, let's go play on the slides, let's go do this, let's go to that. They learn leadership when they are even that young, and that is a good part of it. And they also end up learning forgiveness, which is important. I am sorry I hit you with the swing. I am sorry I bumped you on the slide. Kids learn their moral values really between their birth age and their age of 5. That is when they learn how to forgive each other, how to be nice to each other, how to grow up together. The playground sets those avenues.

I often hear my wife tell me that she feels so much better after she has run in the morning. And she gets the same rush of serotonin that the kids get when they play on a playground. This chemical in the brain is released as the kids play and exert energy.

And another thing that is so good about playgrounds, and I think all of you can remember the days when you played there, because you felt like there was a feeling of

belonging. And you felt like you belonged to the kids that played with you on the playground. I can remember my playground nearby was Churchill Park. Well, that playground became a place where we all belonged. And you took that network, many times years later, in your feeling of belonging.

When kids play together on a regular basis, they feel a sense of that belonging. When accompanied by their parents who may help them and push them on a swing or catch them on a slide, they feel loved and part of the family. Kids that learn, they learn better if they feel like they are part of something, they belong to a family, they belong to a church, they belong to a club, even a boys club, girls club. This helps them in their learning process as they feel good about themselves.

When the war in Sarajevo ended, USAID asked us to build a playground for them and for the children of this war-torn city. That site that they selected was where the Christians, and they had a hill advantage, they shot at the Muslim kids where they ran through the hand-dug trenches to go to secure food and attend their makeshift schools. We filled those trenches, we took away the old battered cars, and we built a beautiful playground, complete with benches for moms and dads to watch their children play.

The playground has brought joy and fun to those kids, but also it helped them to mend the hurts of war, as Christians and Muslims sat together socializing while they watched their kids play, and they began to become friends because of the playground setting. And they socialized just as though the war never happened.

Many dads are -- from families today in the USA and around the world are missing from the family today, and a play area grants dads an easier way to do something with their kids. They can't all play sports, they can't all be good at sports, but they can go with their child to a local playground and feel the bonding that occurs there and enjoy their time together.

When we build a playground, we look for local volunteers to help, giving them the feeling of ownership. This was true in Brovary, a suburb of Kiev. And this is the effect of playgrounds on a community. The local mayor loved the thought of receiving a playground. Since the first playground was built, local entrepreneurs and the city has continued to build more playgrounds and parks. Years later, the town has been transformed into a model city. According to the mayor, the playgrounds were the catalyst, creating a community with healthy values oriented to children, resulting in many young people choosing Brovary as a place to live and raise their families because there was parks everywhere in that particular city just outside of Kiev.

We work with many partners, and this is the effect of playgrounds on nations. In Haiti, after the earthquake, we built 50 playgrounds working with Compassion International at their orphanages there, including one for Greta Van Susteren and Greta's Home and Academy there. Ten projects were developed in northern Iraq in

collaboration with Samaritan's Purse. These child-friendly spaces became safe places in environments where Iraqi, Kurdish, and Yazidi children could be impacted and taken away from the threat of ISIS.

And they could play, interact, and learn to laugh again.

In Lebanon, we developed three separate play areas. Our partners there are reporting great success from the effectively -- effects of the playground, therapeutic value, and are able to open up new ways that parents are able to focus on their children's needs than -- the ways have been difficult for them as they have been involved in a flight movement and environment. Three more projects are scheduled to be developed in Lebanon later this year.

We receive routine reports from partners on how the children have suffered from PTSD-induced anxiety attacks and anger outbursts, and they begin to relax and trust and return to their child-appropriate behavior as a result of play.

Finally, our work in Jordan just began last year with two playgrounds built with partners serving the Syrian refugee communities there. Four more projects are scheduled this year in Jordan, one of them being inside Zaatari camp, the fifth largest camp in Jordan, with a population of over 80,000 Syrian refugees; 60 percent of those are under the age of 16.

And, by the way, it was mentioned about Kenya. Kenya has the largest refugee camp of over 200,000 refugees in that camp. And Melissa Fleming, who heads up the communications of the UNHCR, she visited our office recently. And she suggested that maybe we could be part of the building of a brandnew camp in Kenya, working with the UNHCR.

Organizations like Compassion, Samaritan's Purse, World Vision, USAID, UNICEF, UNHCR, including the local communities, have all helped us, and even the local communities donate sand, land, and labor.

Finally, over the last 22 years, it has been an honor and a blessing to help children and their families in great need around the world through the simple gift of play, partnering with our U.S. shareholders. These include businesses, churches, schools, and individuals. Kids Around the World finds that our model of harvesting and repurposing American-manufactured playgrounds due to their quality, safety, and durability, provides the very best overall value to the recipients, which are the children in the communities.

I would like to think of these big, beautiful, multicolored playgrounds as ambassadors from our country to theirs, ambassadors for peace. Inherent within each are the principles that shaped our great Nation, the universal, God-given, unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, which includes play and

playgrounds.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Johnson follows]

## **PREPARED STATEMENT OF DENNY JOHNSON**

# **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing**

Randy Hultgren, M.C. Co-Chair

James P. McGovern, M.C. Co-Chair

## ***Defending the Rights of Vulnerable Children and Youth through Education: A Focus on the Role of Self-teaching and Play***

Kids Around the World exists to bring hope to children living in challenging circumstances. Our programs focus on leveraging Play, Nutrition and Teacher Training using faith based storytelling skills. To date we have built 650 playgrounds in 64 countries, 50 in the USA. Our organization has shipped 20,000,000 meals to kids and trained thousands of teachers.

Our playgrounds: Park Districts all over America are changing out their playgrounds for new ones. Old ones are destined for the land fill. They call us. We rescue them! Repair of the donated used playgrounds by park districts, takes place using volunteers, students struggling with life issues plus local prisoners and addicts in recovery.

### **PLAY: Playgrounds.....*the effect on Kids.***

Play teaches children fundamental societal values and skills. Conflict resolution, fairness, trust, collaboration and forgiveness, building blocks for a civil society, are learned on monkey-bars and swing-sets.

I often hear my wife tell me that she feels so much better after a run in the morning. She gets the same rush of serotonin that kids get, when they play on the playground. This chemical in the brain is released in kids as they play and exert energy.

A feeling of belonging. When kids play together on a regular basis, they feel a sense of “belonging”. When accompanied by their parents, who may help push them on a swing or catch them on a slide, they feel loved and part of a family.

### **PLAY: Playgrounds..... *the effect on Moms, Dads and Caregivers.***

When the war in Sarajevo ended USAID asked us to build a playground for the children of this war-torn city. The site that they selected was where Christians, with a hill advantage, shot at Muslims where children ran through hand dug trenches to go to secure food and attend a makeshift school. We filled the trenches and built a beautiful playground complete with benches

for moms and dads to watch their children play. The playground brought joy and fun to the kids but also helped to mend the hurts of war, as Christians and Muslims sat together socializing while watching their children play together, as if the war had not even happened.

Many Dads are missing from the family today....in the USA and around the world. A play area gives Dads an easy way to do something with their child.... bonding.... enjoying time together, regardless of income or wealth. It's also true about moms and caregivers. Time together.

### **PLAY: Playgrounds.....*the effect on Communities.***

When we build a playground, we look for local volunteers to help, giving them a feeling of ownership. This was true in Brovary a suburb of Kiev. The local mayor loved the thought of receiving a playground. Since the first playgrounds were built, local entrepreneurs and the city has continued to build more parks. Years later, the town had been transformed into a model city. According to the mayor, the playgrounds were the catalyst - creating a community with healthy values oriented toward children - resulting in many young people choosing Brovary as the place to live and raise their families.

### **PLAY: Playgrounds..... *the effect on Nations.***

We work with many partners....in Haiti, after the earthquake, we built 50 playgrounds at Compassion International's orphanages, including one for Greta Van Susteren at her "Greta's Home and Academy".

10 projects were developed in Northern Iraq (Kurdistan), in collaboration with Samaritans Purse. These "Child Friendly Spaces" became safe play environments where Iraqi, Kurdish and Yazidi children impacted by the threat of ISIS, could play, interact and learn to laugh again.

In Lebanon, we developed 3 separate play sites, tucked inside of communities that are co-located with Syrian refugee camps and settlements. Our partners there are reporting success stories from effectively leveraging the play activities toward playgrounds with therapeutic outcomes, as families come together for joint counseling and interaction on the playgrounds. Children drop their guards and are able to open up in new ways, and parents are able to focus on their children's needs in ways that have been difficult to achieve in a flight environment. 3 more projects are scheduled for development in Lebanon later this year.

We receive routine reports from partners of how children that had suffered from PTSD-induced anxiety attacks and anger outbursts, begin to relax, trust and return to child-appropriate behavior, as a result of play.

Finally, our work in Jordan began last year with two playground builds with partners serving the Syrian refugee communities there. Each site hosts children's programs and one is a dedicated school (K-9) for children that would otherwise not be afforded the opportunity to public education. 4 more projects are scheduled for 2017 in Jordan, with one of them being inside of



Zaatari Camp, the fifth largest camp in Jordan, with a population of 80,000 Syrian refugees (60% of these are under the age of 16).

Organizations like Compassion, Samaritan's Purse, World Vision, USAID, \*\*UNICEF, Rotary, Kiwanis, Foundations, Churches, NGOs and private donations help fund the playgrounds .... including local communities donating sand, land and labor.

## **PLAY: A final thought**

Over the past 22 years, It has been an honor and blessing to help children and their families in great need around the world through the simple gift of play. Partnering with our US stakeholders – these include businesses, churches, schools and individuals. Kids Around the World finds that our model of harvesting and repurposing American manufactured playgrounds - due to their quality, safety and durability - provides the very best overall value to the recipients, which are the children and their communities.

I like to think of these big, beautiful, multi-colored playgrounds as ambassadors from our country to theirs. Ambassadors for peace\*. Inherent within each are the principles that shaped our great nation – the universal, God given and unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness which includes “Play”.

Dennis Johnson, Founder & Chairman of Kids Around the World

[www.KidsAroundtheWorld.com](http://www.KidsAroundtheWorld.com) 4750 Hydraulic Rd., Rockford, IL 61109



\*Kids Around the World has built 11 playgrounds at orphanages in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

\*\*UNICEF helped us in Cuba, enabling us to build 3 playgrounds on the island.

125 playgrounds are scheduled to be built this year with over 500 volunteers.

Mr. HULTGREN: Thank you, Denny.

Next, Lindsay Groves with Right To Play.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF LINDSAY GROVES, VICE-PRESIDENT, PROGRAM  
DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION, RIGHT TO PLAY INTERNATIONAL**

Ms. GROVES: Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman Hultgren and Chairman McGovern, members of the commission.

Thank you for coordinating this important hearing and for inviting Right To Play to share our experience driving forward an innovative approach to child rights and education, an approach focused on play-based learning.

Mr. HULTGREN: Can you pull your microphone a little bit closer?

Ms. GROVES: A little closer.

Right To Play is the largest global development organization focused exclusively using the power of play to transform the lives of children and youth affected by war, poverty, and disease. We train teachers and community coaches to harness the power of play to promote learning and development for children and youth both inside and outside of the classroom.

Children are the world's most vulnerable population, experiencing a broad range of rights violations, including being at risk of child labor, physical abuse, sexual violence, frequently lacking access to healthcare and support services, and critically lacking access to quality education.

While education is a fundamental human right for children, currently 263 million school-age children are out of school. Of these, 75 million live in conflict-affected countries. For vulnerable children and youth in fragile and conflict-affected countries, the impact of disrupted education is devastating and affects their ability to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

We are in the midst of a learning crisis. And if current trends continue, only one in three children will learn the basic primary-level skills by 2030. We need new models and innovative solutions to cope with this learning crisis.

At Right To Play, we believe that a focus on play-based learning is one innovative solution that is both effective and scalable in ensuring holistic child development and promoting education for all. Play, as enshrined in Article 31 of the UNCRC, is a powerful tool for promoting learning for children and youth, and is a

major contributor to the development and enhancement of critical life skills that allow children and youth to thrive throughout their lives. Play transforms dynamics inside and outside the classroom by creating caring, supportive, and committed relationships between teachers and students, and positive learning environments where children feel safe.

Our approach also supports children to have a sense of belonging in agency, as well as a space to reflect and search for meaning. We do this through our experiential approach to learning using a method we call Reflect-Connect-Apply. After a play session, children reflect on their experience, connect their learning to a real life situation, and apply this knowledge to everyday experiences going forward. In this way, children benefit from the inherent qualities of play, from the key learning of the play session, as well as build critical life skills like self-awareness, self-reflection, communication, through their experience of play.

Play also allows children to be a part of claiming their human rights. Children and youth in Right To Play programs are found to be more involved in leadership roles in their community, have stronger levels of self-esteem and well-being. One way Right To Play promotes this is by ensuring children's active and meaningful participation in our programs. For example, we promote child-led programming, creating space for children to design and develop their own learning games that promote and educate children on their rights. We have also supported children to establish and lead child rights clubs and national youth parliaments.

For example, in Mali, our youth regional parliaments have mobilized the community to address barriers related to education such as early marriage, corporal punishment, and child labor. The efforts of one child protection club in particular led to the first arrest of a child trafficker in Mali.

The importance of play for vulnerable children and youth in crisis and emergency contexts is particularly significant. According to reports by USAID, sport and play supports children and particularly vulnerable children, such as refugees and internally displaced children, to relieve stress, restore a sense of normalcy, and heal emotional wounds. At Right To Play, we commissioned a research study of our programming in Lebanon with Syrian refugee children to better understand the link between play and psychosocial support. More than 1 million refugees were officially registered in Lebanon by the end of 2016 with children and youth representing half of that population.

Beyond the traumatic experience of war itself, the strain the refugee influx has on Lebanese society filters down to these refugee children who suffer additional effects of bullying, social isolation, poverty, and a sense of hopelessness. The research study found that the effects were more traumatic in Lebanon than actually the experience of the war itself in Syria.

Play can mitigate some of these effects, helping children to reclaim an understanding of the world in which hope and joy are at the center.

Underpinning the use of play in these contexts is the idea that when children encounter stress or trauma, their thoughts can change their feelings, which influences their actions. Play can reduce the effects of trauma, because when a child is focused on play, these positive actions impact their feelings, which helps transform their thoughts.

For example, in our resource manual for psychosocial support in response to the Ebola crisis, a table shows what games to play when children are feeling a particular emotion. If a child or a group is feeling despair, a game based on trust can be played so that they can feel hope. A positive and a negative emotions dictionary helps coaches and teachers understand and communicate these emotions better.

Ultimately, research and our experience in programming points to play-based learning as an innovative solution that is both effective and scalable in promoting education for all. Play makes sense for children. And in these contexts where the world is rapidly changing, but especially in refugee context, in crisis-affected communities, play is the most natural form of learning for children.

The United States Government, therefore, has an opportunity to better respond to the needs and rights of vulnerable children through focus on the use of play in three very important ways. First, increase funding for children's rights in education through official development assistance for direct aid to basic education by investing in multilateral partnerships and by funding innovative civil society organizations. Since 2002, the share of education in total over official development assistance globally has fallen from 13 to 10 percent. And as the largest provider for ODA for basic education, the United States must show continued leadership by increasing ODA targeted for education, especially for fragile, low-income recipient countries. The United States should also continue to show leadership in a global partnership for education, striving to meet its GPE targets in this year of replenishment.

Secondly, and most importantly, create opportunities to have children and youth voice be part of decisionmaking, including children from fragile and conflict-affected countries. For example, create spaces for young people to share their experiences here at Congress, engage youth perspectives in the Congress structure. In this way, children's agency and participation are at the heart of any policy decisions being made about them.

Finally, ratify and uphold the Convention on the Rights of the Child, showing global commitment to realizing the rights of children, including the right to education, as well as the right to play. The United States can also support shifts for organizations in other countries, especially those receiving ODA, to operate from a child-rights-based approach. This would also have significant benefit for children

around the world.

We all know children and youth are our future, and it is vitally important that we do everything in our power to ensure that their rights are protected and upheld.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Groves follows]

## **PREPARED STATEMENT OF LINDSAY GROVES**

### **Defending the Rights of Vulnerable Children and Youth through Education: A Focus on the Role of Self-teaching and Play**

Testimony for Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Lindsay Groves, VP Program Development and Evaluation, Right To Play International

Good Afternoon. Chairman Hultgren, Chairman McGovern, members of the commission: thank you for coordinating this important hearing and for inviting Right To Play to share our experience driving forward an innovative approach to child rights and education; an approach focused on play-based learning. Right To Play is the only global development organization focused exclusively on using the power of play to transform the lives of children and youth affected by war, poverty and disease. We train teachers and coaches to harness the power of play to promote learning and development inside and outside the classroom.

Children are the world's most vulnerable population, experiencing a broad range of rights violations, including being at risk of child labour, physical abuse and sexual violence, frequently lacking access to health care and support services, and critically, lacking access to quality education. While education is a fundamental human right for children<sup>1</sup>, currently 263 million school-aged children and youth globally are out of school. Of these, 75 million live in 35 crisis-affected countries.<sup>2</sup> For the vulnerable children and youth in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, the impact of disrupted education is devastating, affecting their ability to lead a healthy life and reach their full potential. For example, since conflict broke out in Mali in 2012 – which is one country in which we work – the education of over 700,000 children has been compromised.

We are in the midst of a 'learning crisis'. If current trends continue, only one in three children will learn basic primary-level skills by 2030. We need new models – innovative solutions – to cope with this learning crisis. At Right To Play, we believe that a focus on play-based learning

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<sup>1</sup> As enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 26), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (Art. 28 and 29)

<sup>2</sup> GEM, 2016; ODI, 2016

is one innovative solution that is both effective and scalable in ensuring holistic child development and promoting education for all.

Play (as enshrined in Article 31 in the UNCRC) is a powerful tool in promoting learning for children and youth and is a major contributor to the development and enhancement of critical life skills that allow children and youth to thrive throughout their lives.<sup>3</sup> Play transforms dynamics inside and outside the classroom by creating caring, supportive and committed relationships between teachers and students, and positive learning environments, where children feel safe. Our approach also supports children to have a sense of belonging and agency, as well as space to reflect and search for meaning. We do this through our experiential approach to learning, using ‘Reflect-Connect-Apply’: children *reflect* on the experience of play, *connect* their learning to real-life situations, and *apply* their knowledge to their everyday experiences going forward. In this way, children learn the curriculum, as well as critical life skills, through their experience of play.

Play allows children to be a part of claiming their human rights. Children and youth in Right To Play programs are found to be more involved in leadership roles in their communities, and have stronger levels of self-esteem and well-being. One way Right To Play promotes this is by ensuring children’s active participation in our programs: for example, we have promoted child-led programming, creating space for children to design and develop their own learning games that promote and educate children on their rights. We have also supported children to establish and lead in child rights clubs and national youth parliaments. For example, in Mali, our youth regional parliaments have mobilized the community to address barriers related to education, such as early marriage, corporal punishment and child labour.

The importance of play for vulnerable children and youth in crisis and emergency contexts is particularly significant. According to USAID, sport and play support children, and particularly vulnerable children such as refugees and internally displaced children, to relieve stress, restore a sense of normalcy and heal emotional wounds. At Right To Play, we commissioned a research study of our programming in Lebanon with Syrian refugee children to better understand the link between play and psychosocial support. More than 1 million refugees were officially registered in Lebanon by the end of 2016, with children and youth making up over 50% of this population. Beyond the traumatic experiences of war itself, the strain the refugee influx has on Lebanese society filters down to these refugee children who suffer the additional effects of bullying, social isolation, poverty and a sense of hopelessness. Play can mitigate some of these effects, helping vulnerable children to reclaim an understanding of the world in which hope and joy are central.

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<sup>3</sup> When operationalized, these broader life-skills categories include facets that comprise both individual and social skills - such as critical thinking skills, creativity, confidence, self-regulation, endurance and flexibility, as well as enabling trust and respect for others.

Supporting Children’s Development NCAC - [http://ncac.acecqa.gov.au/educator-resources/pcf-articles/Life\\_skills\\_Dec09.pdf](http://ncac.acecqa.gov.au/educator-resources/pcf-articles/Life_skills_Dec09.pdf)

Underpinning the use of play in these contexts is the idea that when children encounter stress or trauma, their thoughts can change their feelings, which then influence their actions. Play can reduce the effects of trauma because when a child is focused on play, these positive actions impact their feelings, which help transform their thoughts. For example, in the resource manual for psychosocial support in response to the Ebola crisis, a table shows what specific games to play when children are feeling a particular emotion. If a child or the group is feeling 'despair', a game based on 'trust' can be played, so they can feel 'hope'. If they are feeling 'doubt', a game based on 'purpose' can be played, so they can feel 'confidence'. A positive and negative emotions dictionary helps coaches and teachers understand and communicate these emotions better.

Ultimately, the research and programming evidence clearly points to play-based learning as an innovative solution that is both effective and scalable in promoting education for all. Play also makes sense for children: in all contexts, where the world is rapidly changing, but especially in refugee contexts and crisis-affected communities, play is the most natural form for learning. The US government, therefore, has an opportunity to better respond to the needs and rights of vulnerable children, through a focus on the use of play, in three important ways:

- **First**, increase funding for children's rights and education, through official development assistance for direct aid to basic education, by investing in multilateral partnerships and by funding innovative civil society organizations. Since 2002, the share of education in total official development assistance globally has fallen from 13 to 10 percent. As the largest provider of ODA for basic education, the US must show continued leadership by increasing ODA targeted for education, and especially for fragile and low-income recipient countries. The USA should also continue to show leadership in the GPE, striving to meet its GPE targets in this year of replenishment.
- **Second**, create opportunities to have children and youth voices be part of decision-making, including children from fragile and conflict-affected countries. For example, create spaces for young people to share their perspectives here at Congress and engage youth perspectives in the Congress structure. In this way, children's agency and participation are at the heart of any policy decisions made about them.
- **Finally**, ratify and uphold the Convention on the Rights of the Child, showing global commitment to promoting and realizing children's rights, including the right to education, as well as the right to play. The USA should also support shifts for organizations and other countries, especially those receiving ODA, to operate from a child-rights based approach. This would have significant benefit for children in the US and around the world.

Children and youth are the future. It is vitally important that we do everything in our power to ensure that children's rights are protected and upheld, including their right to education. Thank you.





Mr. HULTGREN: Thank you, very much, Lindsay.

Next, grateful to have Hakan Habip with us.

Mr. Habip.

## **STATEMENT OF HAKAN HABIP, FOUNDER, SCIENCE HEROES ASSOCIATION**

Mr. HABIP: Thank you.

Co-chairs, Mr. Hultgren and Mr. McGovern, members of the executive committee, members of the Commission, honorable guests, thank you for your invitation.

Parts of what I will say may seem preposterous. Some of these concepts are difficult to shoulder. Since 17 years, I am trying to be a humble servant and share them with great humility. If I do not bring them out now, I will not be doing justice to them. They are the concepts that brought me here. Acting upon them is easier, I admit, than advocating them. Please give me the benefit of the doubt.

Can we start with one word and reach regional peace or more? The volunteers of Science Heroes Association have developed certain methods of establishing deep engagement. By sharing our methods and observations, I would like to suggest to you that we can. I should. I have had the privilege of working with children and youth from all layers of the Turkish society for the past 13 years, including the underserved and the traumatized. It has been an inspirational journey for me and for the thousands of volunteers who serve these amazing kids.

Once given the opportunity, children become children. Fun, learning, sharing, they find meaning. They inspire others. They engage in increasing the quality of life for all. I will describe a learning experience that has the power to transform and empower the participants, their siblings, parents, colleagues, teachers, and in time, their communities. The experience uses technology. Students design and code autonomous robots, usually using a PC. They use the internet to conduct research. Currently, this activity takes place in 88 countries.

What we do differently in Turkey is what I would like to talk about. It is what I call a holistic approach that includes a defined purpose, a set of universal values, and a preferred language, as well as various experiences designed with these specific factors in mind. This model can be replicated anywhere.

It all started in 1999. After 17 years in the -- 7 years in the IT industry, I found myself working on a project to design a better internet service provider and started experimenting with a few concepts. I noticed that an ISP can be viewed as a

loyal community. Any organization, any company, in fact any country, can be viewed as a loyal community. Each is as valuable as their loyal constituents. For example, a loyal client would continue to use the same brand or continue to pay taxes. I realized that we all build loyal communities throughout our lives with or without realizing what we are doing. Your childhood, high school, college, office buddies, or your Facebook, LinkedIn buddies are part of your loyal communities. Yes, some may be more loyal than the others.

In short, I said, we each are here to build. I imagine building as a universal purpose of life, one word. Then I questioned: If we are all here to build and build loyal communities, is there a formula? In order to answer that question, I started with the intended last step of loyalty and attempted, with no prejudice or assumptions, to make my way back to the first step. Loyalty, community, learning, listening, speaking, life, and sincerity are the seven steps that emerged.

I am skipping the process. But here is how I verified the sequence. The sincerity between your parents produced you, life. They spoke to you, gave to you. They listened to you, received from you. They learned with you. Thus, your family has built a community, and each of you, by being loyal to this community, has internalized building loyal communities or simply building.

If you question your best deeds, do not be surprised if you find these steps in action. I call these universal values a kind of universal interface for any relationship.

At Science Heroes Association, we rarely talk about this purpose nor the universal values. However, we notice that each student arrives with these already engrained, as universal values should be. On the other hand, the language we use at our events and how we run our events has been influenced by these ideas. For example, we do not use words that divide: competition, individualism. We do not use words that might incite division: ethnicity, creed, patriotism. We never use the word "culture" to mean a static state but only as a set of actions. We do not use a flag nor a national anthem.

We emphasize that science unites once defined as any action that increases the quality of life.

Thirteen seasons, about 100 events, 17,000 students from 56 cities, 26 countries, some 30,000 parents, some 2,000 teachers, thousands of volunteers, and over 100,000 volunteer hours later, I can say we observe the following.

Children express themselves freely and feel that they are the architects of our events. They are perceptive, and they recognize quality and authenticity. They have strong feelings of fairness and justice. They do not have prejudices. They relish diversity and complementarity. They naturally share, collaborate, and build together. They are kind. They learn from each other. They imagine themselves as contributing

global citizens, able entrepreneurs, resourceful engineers, and science heroes of the future. They see strangers volunteering for them, and as a result, the feelings of social solidarity, the chances of them volunteering increase. They are at peace with life and humanity at large.

The participants, unless brainwashed by fear or by imposed feelings of victimization, will have no reason to display animosity to anyone. This means if we continue what we are doing with students coming from our neighbors, Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Cypress, and expand the circle every year to include the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East, and other volatile religions, I am that confident we can help build peace in a bottom-up fashion. In a region historically infested with violence, this is not a bad place to end up for a team that started with one word.

The biggest reason for the violence may just be the children and youth and parents have lost hope. Science Heroes Association gives back moments of hope. If our approach works, it will affect generations to come. Our solution is endemic to the region, which is crucial to overcoming cynicism and eroded trust. And our approach is even more valuable where ideological approaches to education worldwide color the content and polarize the masses along divisive lines. We may share the perception that humanity is running out of time, as other speakers have talked about it. A bottom-up diplomacy with holistic tools, such as the one described here, can complement the efforts that promote, defend, and advocate human rights.

It would be my heartfelt wish that the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Government, and other governments and legislative bodies, corporations around the world, entrepreneurs, foundations, and other NGOs consider encouraging donations to nonprofits like Science Heroes Association, thus helping assure its survival and building capacity.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Habip follows]

## PREPARED STATEMENT OF HAKAN HABIP

Co-chairs Mr. Hultgren & Mr. McGovern, members of the Executive Committee, members of the commission, honorable guests, **thank you** for your invitation.

Parts of what I will say may seem preposterous. **Some of these concepts are difficult to shoulder.** Since 17 years I am trying to be a humble servant and share them with great humility. **If I do not bring them out now, I will not be doing justice to them.** They are the concepts that brought me here. **Acting upon them is easier than advocating them.** Please give me the benefit of a doubt.

**Can we start with one word and reach regional peace and more?** The volunteers of Science Heroes Association have developed certain methods of **establishing deep engagement.** By sharing our **methods and observations** I would like to suggest to you that we can.

I should. **I've had the privilege** of working with children & youth **from all layers of the Turkish society** for the past 13 years including **the underserved and the traumatized.** It has been an inspirational journey for me and for the thousands of volunteers who **served these amazing kids.**

Once given the opportunity, children become children: **fun, learning, sharing,** they find meaning, **they inspire others,** they **engage in increasing the quality of life for all.** I will describe a learning experience that has the power to transform & empower the participants, **their siblings,** parents, **colleagues,** teachers, **and in time, their communities.**

The experience uses technology: students **design and code autonomous robots** usually using a PC. They use **the internet to conduct** research. Currently, this **activity takes place** in 88 countries. **What we do differently in Turkey** is what I would like to talk about. **It is what I call a holistic approach ...** that includes **a defined purpose,** a set of "universal" values, and **a preferred language ...** as well as various experiences designed with these specific factors in mind. **This model can be replicated anywhere.**

It all started in 1999. After 7 years in the IT industry, I found myself working on a project to design **a better Internet Service Provider (ISP)** and started experimenting with a few concepts. I noticed that **an ISP can be viewed as a loyal community.** Any organization, any company, **in fact, any country can be viewed as a loyal community.** Each is as **valuable as their "loyal constituents."** For example, a "loyal client" would continue **to use the same brand** or **continue to pay taxes.**

I realized that we all build loyal communities throughout our lives **with or without realizing what we are doing:** your childhood, **high-school,** college, **office buddies,** or your Facebook, **Linked-In buddies** are part of your "loyal communities." **Yes, some may be more loyal than**

others😊 In short I said, we each are here to “build.” I imagined “building” as a universal purpose of life: one word.

Then, I questioned: if we are **all here to build and build loyal communities**, is there a “formula?” In order to answer that question, I started with the **intended last step of “loyalty,”** and attempted, with no prejudice or assumptions, to make my way back to **the first step.**

Loyalty, **community**, learning, **listening**, speaking, **life**, and sincerity **are the 7 steps that emerged.** I am skipping the process, **but here is how I verify the sequence:** the sincerity **between your parents produced you (life)**, they spoke to you (*gave to you*), they listened to you (*received from you*), they learned with you, **thus your family has built a community**, and each of you by being loyal to this community, **has internalized “building loyal communities” or simply “building.”**

**If you question your best deeds**, do not **be surprised if you find these steps in action.** I call these “universal values,” **a universal interface for any relationship.**

At SHA, we rarely talk about this purpose, nor the universal values. However, **we notice that each student arrives with these already ingrained as universal values should be.**

On the other hand, **the language we use at our events** and **how we run our events** have been influenced by these ideas.

For example:

- we do not use words that **divide: i.e. competition, individualism,**
- we do not use words that might incite division: **i.e. ethnicity, creed, patriotism,**
- we never use the word culture to **mean a static state...but only as a set of actions,**
- we do not use a flag, **nor a national anthem,**
- we emphasize that **“science unites”** - once defined as any action that increases the quality of life...

**13 seasons**, about one hundred events 17.000 students from 56 cities, **26 countries**, some 30.000 parents, **some 2.000 teachers**, thousands of volunteers, and **over 100.000 volunteer hours later**, I can say we observe the following:

0. Children **express themselves freely** and feel that they are the architects of our events.
1. **They are perceptive; they recognize quality & authenticity.**
2. They have **strong feelings of fairness & justice.**
3. **They do not have prejudices (they relish diversity & complementarity.)**
4. They naturally **share, collaborate, and build together.**

5. They are **kind**.
6. They **learn from each other**.
9. **They imagine themselves as contributing global citizens, able entrepreneurs, resourceful engineers and science heroes of the future.**
10. They see **strangers volunteering for them**. As a result, the feelings of social solidarity, the chances **of them volunteering increase**.
11. **They are at peace with life and humanity at large.**
13. The participants, unless **“brainwashed by fear or by imposed feelings of victimization,”** will have no reason to display animosity.
14. **This means, if we continue what we are doing** with students coming from our neighbors (Greece, **Bulgaria**, Georgia, **Armenia**, Azerbaijan, **Iran**, Iraq, **Syria**, Cyprus, and expand this circle every year to include **the Balkans**, the Caucasuses, and **the Middle East**, and other volatile regions,) **I am confident that we can help build peace in a bottom-up fashion.**

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**The biggest reason for the violence** may just be that children and youth (and parents) have lost hope. **Science Heroes Association gives back moments of hope.**

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**It would be my heartfelt wish** that the US Congress, **the US government**, other governments and legislative bodies, **corporations around the world**, entrepreneurs, **foundations**, and other NGO's consider **encouraging donations to non-profits like SHA** thus **helping assure its survival and building capacity.**

Thank you.

Mr. HULTGREN: Thank you so much for your testimony, each of you. I am going to recognize my co-chairman.

Mr. McGOVERN: I, unfortunately, need to leave.

I just wanted to take the opportunity to thank all of you, Mr. Johnson, Ms. Groves, and Mr. Habip. Thank you so much for your testimony. I am really so impressed with what you are working on and what you have done.

And, Ms. Groves, you said that children are our future. I would just add they are a hundred percent of our future. And this is -- you know, so all this stuff is so important. And ways that we can be helpful here -- Mr. Habip, I just want to say, you know, I think education is not just about giving people information. It is about teaching values and respect. And, you know, it is not just a challenge in difficult parts of the world. It is a challenge here in the United States. I am just -- I am editorializing here. But always one of my complaints about education in the United States is that, when we learn history in the United States, we learn a lot about the wars we fought. We don't learn a lot about the peacemakers in this country and around the world. And I sometimes think that people think that nonviolence and peace are not solutions, that they don't work. And we have had examples, time and time again, where they have worked. But we need to teach people these things as well.

So, but, thank you so much. And I apologize that I have to leave. But I appreciate, very much, you being here.

Mr. HULTGREN: Thank you, Co-chairman McGovern.

I want to be respectful. We are a little bit over time. I want to make sure you all are okay with that. If anybody needs to leave, let me know. I think they are going to call votes again in about 15 minutes. We might have about that much time, if that is all right. If I can ask some questions, just, again, for the record, going forward. But, again, thank you all. Appreciate your work. Appreciate your passion and echo much of what my co-chairman had said, as well, of just how important this is.

Denny, I wonder if I could start with you. You and I have talked a little bit about this. But I wondered if you could maybe go into a little bit more detail of some of the places you have gone into are very difficult situations, authoritarian nations. How do they respond to you? Do you feel like -- are you under threat? Is there concern? Are they watching your every move? Do you feel like you and others who are there are safe? Or what has been the response when you have gone to some of these places that we question if it is safe to go to?

Mr. JOHNSON: Sure. Thanks for the question.

Probably the most difficult place, of course, was North Korea. And there, we

were invited in by the country leader, who wanted us to build playgrounds at each one of the orphanages that they had, and they have 23. And so far, we have done 11, and we have another five playgrounds that are ready to be installed.

But when we go into a country, we plan to respect each nation's laws, and we understand that we are invited to them -- into their country as a guest. And our goal is to take care of the children and provide play material and swings and jungle gyms and the other enjoyable play things that they can use. And so we are not so concerned about the politics.

And we have been in other difficult areas on the Amazon River, where you never know what kind of a tribe you are going to run into. But even by boat, we bring down the playgrounds. But we are very careful to introduce ourselves and not do anything that would infringe upon their rights as a country.

Mr. HULTGREN: Has that worked well? What has been the response from those countries?

Mr. JOHNSON: It works very well. And I can usually go into any country and request time before a First Lady. And every single time I have done that, I have been able to see them.

If I come in with a container load of food, I can't see her. She is too busy. If I come up with a carload of clothes, I can't see her. She is too busy. If I tell her that I have got a playground that we are possibly thinking about installing in her country, she is more than happy to do that because engrained in each one of the politicians and dictators all over the world is their reality that they would like to cut the ribbon when you come to a playground opening. And they want to do something for their kids. And that is all good. And we want that to happen. And, indeed, it has happened all over the world for us.

Mr. HULTGREN: That is great. Thank you.

Lindsay, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about -- I think all of us here would agree how important play is. But we also have talked about just some fundamental challenges, food, shelter, security. You know, so how do we balance that? With limited resources, how do we make sure we are meeting those truly life-sustaining needs? But how do we put play in that prioritization? And, again, with limited resources, how do we do that?

Ms. GROVES: That is a great question.

So play for us is really the entry point. It is the starting point. And all of our programming is holistic. We realized really early on that we could implement excellent play-based learning programs at a primary school that was intended to



increase enrollment and attendance and increase literacy and numeracy skills. But if girls didn't have a latrine to use when they are menstruating, they are going to miss 25 percent of the school year. And that has always been very clear for us.

So we work with a lot of other community-based partners, international NGOs, and government ministries so that, when we are working in a particular school or with a particular community, we are looking at all of the holistic barriers that might exist to children thriving and meeting their full potential. Water sanitation and hygiene is one. In another setting, it might also be access to hygiene materials or access to mosquito nets or other barriers that might affect children's well-being.

Mr. HULTGREN: I would ask maybe both of you, again, if you can start, Lindsay, how do you know where to go? Are you contacted? Are you reaching out? Is Right To Play reaching out to these countries? How do you know where to go and provide this information, that entry into that to provide some help to those children?

Ms. GROVES: That is a great question. We operate in 16 countries globally, in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, as well as in Canada, and also in the United States. Within our programs, we partner with local ministries, and national ministries. So much of our work is very much predicated on what the issue that a particular ministry or particular country is facing. An example, for instance, of how we work in Canada, we work across 88 indigenous communities in Canada. And we only work by request. So communities actually submit an application form and request the program before Right To Play actually provides any sort of programming in those communities.

Mr. HULTGREN: Denny, how do you know where to go with your playgrounds? I mean, how do you make that initial connection?

Mr. JOHNSON: We will do about 125 playgrounds this year. And rather than telling organizations, and foundations, and groups, where we want them to go, what we found, it is best is if they contact us and ask us to come or bring a playground into a certain area.

We might find a group, for example, a church, that has got a missionary in some country, and they would like a playground for that particular missionary or next to -- build a playground -- we prefer to build playgrounds next to orphanages and next to schools. Because what we found in -- and then we will go to there, and we will build a playground at their request. But what we found, especially in schools, for example, when I was in Niger, there was a regular school and there was also a school with a playground. They lined up before the school year as to where the kids would go to school. Almost a hundred percent, the kids who saw the playgrounds wanted to go to that school that had the playgrounds. They didn't know enough about education or what they were going to be involved in in being educated, but their moms knew. And the playground, actually, was a draw and an attraction toward those schools because of the playground, which is -- ends up with the great result that you want.

Mr. HULTGREN: Thanks.

Hakan, thank you for your work. You and I share a passion for robotics and all of the opportunities that it opens up to young people. So thank you for your great work in Turkey and other places as well.

I wonder if you could just talk a little bit about -- as I am reminded again of the amazing impact that Science Heroes Association has had on so many young people in Turkey. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how you have scaled that up, so starting with just a small group of people into something that is affecting so many people. How has that worked? What are, I think, some of the biggest lessons you have learned of bringing it to a larger audience?

And then, if I could have a followup question, as well -- we have seen and talked about a lot of refugee populations around the world. But, also, Turkey, I know, has felt that. So just wondering your thoughts of opportunities in maybe some refugee populations, as well, in Turkey. Have you had some opportunities there, or do you see some opportunity there?

Mr. HABIP: Let me start with the first question. We started just with our friends. And then a very good -- a professor was there from the industrial design faculty of a famous university. And he said, just -- he loved what he saw. And he said, just, please continue. You know how many volunteers are needed to run an event. He made sure that his faculty was behind the growth of these events. So they volunteered. And for years, we were like groupies. Like a rock band, we were going from one city to the next for regional events and for nationals.

Currently, the people who run our volunteer efforts, they do it professionally for other organizations. So it has grown tremendously. The demand is increasing very rapidly, and we temper the demand, because we don't know how much money we are going to find. I mean, every year we go down to zero, and then we have to find a way of building it up again, our bank accounts, that is. And so we temper the growth currently. But, still, from year over year -- from last year, the growth has been 60 percent that now we are covering age 6 through 18 with our events.

Regarding the refugees, there is a huge opportunity, to say the least. We have done some work with the refugees bringing Turkish kids with the refugees. And we have been working on it for the past couple of months. We are in discussions with the U.S. State department, U.S. Consulate, public affairs officials, to organize some public affairs, some pilot projects for the Syrian children.

Of course, scaling up is very, very difficult in our -- in what we do because we are extremely careful regarding quality. As I went through our language, you realize that we are extremely careful to nuts and bolts. So scalability is a problem. But,

given the right amounts of resources, we can reach refugees. And not only the refugees, but bringing refugees together with Turkish kids. Because that is where fault lines are.

Mr. HULTGREN: Great. Thank you.

I am very happy to have a colleague of mine, Commissioner Sheila Jackson Lee from Texas, able to join us. One of our challenges in this place, again, is a lot of demands on our time. So grateful that you are able to come and join with us. I am going to recognize you for a statement or questions or anything that you have.

Ms. JACKSON LEE: The chairman is very kind. And I do apologize. He is absolutely right. From the SCIF in the basement of the Capitol, to the floor of the House, with my committee on the floor, and to here. I did not want to miss this opportunity. I co-chair the Congressional Children's Caucus. And we work with a number of issues. One of our stars -- and she is an emerging young lady now -- is a 12, 13 year old who was shot in the head -- now she is a young lady, Malala -- on the way to school in Pakistan. And as we saw her as a symbol of children's resilience and their desire to learn.

So let me, on the record, thank Christopher Fabian, who I know was here earlier. But each and every one of you, Denny Johnson and Lindsay Groves and Hakan Habip. Almost? Did I get it correct? I have many good friends in Houston who -- similar background, and we interact a lot. So thank you so very much.

I wanted to just put in the record and say, again, what our witness from -- Christopher said, and then ask some questions to you. We have a UNICEF chapter in Houston, as there are many others, and we try to work hard on behalf of children and international organizations such as yours.

Investments in the health, education, protection of the most disadvantaged children help to reverse a vicious intergenerational cycle of poverty in a virtuous cycle. By giving today's disadvantaged children a fair chance in life, they can compete fairly as adults and help grow their economies and stabilize their societies. It goes on to say: UNICEF looks towards new areas, as well, where there are gaps growing more pronounced, pandemics, learning, nutrition, jobs, and refugees.

And so I would like to focus on the world of refugees and internally displaced persons.

I am a member of the Helsinki Commission and will be using my time, as we leave shortly for that mission, to speak about refugees, internally displaced persons, which can be older persons but really the children because they can be right in their land and, of course, be internally displaced. South Sudan is one of those areas right now. And, certainly, Syria and other places come to mind.

But I want to ask sort of a general question, because you deal with children. And I note that UNICEF was attempting -- not attempting but doing something with innovation. Now we are able to use technology to help these children, to equip marginalized youth with 21st century employability skills so we are able to reach them. But we do know that they are living in those conditions. And so I would like to hear from you that, without what you are trying to do, what do we leave to these children that are either refugees, internally displaced, or disadvantaged internationally? And what hope do we leave for them? How vital is it that we have these programs? I notice, you know, being close to certain areas -- and then the second question is -- and I want to be clear that the policies that all nations engage in -- I could be in Great Britain, and be in the Parliament and be adverse to something that they are doing. So I am going to use the United States, because it is important for us to learn that we are part of the global family.

So, for example, if there is a movement afoot to cap the number of refugees that come into the United States, those refugees include children. The refugee policy is usually to deal with the prospective crises that come from around the world. You can't predict a catastrophic natural disaster. You can't predict -- you might see it coming, but you can't see the surge of a manmade conflict that then surges and has people fleeing for their lives. So I would like you to comment on the idea of capping refugees and making it more stringent beyond the security question. Let's put that aside. Common sense is that we all want secure our nations. But questions or processes that diminish the movement of people, whether it is in Greece or Italy or whether it is in the United States.

Mr. Habip?

Mr. HABIP: I mean --

Ms. JACKSON LEE: And impacting children.

Mr. HABIP: There are certain areas within your question that I know about and others I cannot really answer.

Ms. JACKSON LEE: Uh-huh.

Mr. HABIP: But what we notice is the experience children have with -- at our events, you may be familiar with quality tests. Let's say if they carry what they learn to their families and to their friends --

Ms. JACKSON LEE: Uh-huh.

Mr. HABIP: -- and they -- it doesn't -- whatever good the experience does to them doesn't stay with them, but it is carried forward to their siblings, to their friends,

to their families. So it is important to include them because they turn around and affect dozens of others positively. So it is very, very important to include the refugees.

The other issue, capping the number of refugees, I mean, I can't say much about it. But we are all in the same boat, really. The world needs to see signs of hope everywhere.

Ms. JACKSON LEE: Everywhere. Uh-huh.

Mr. HABIP: And people talk about 6 degrees of separation. And we are each just a single step away being a refugee ourselves.

Ms. JACKSON LEE: Uh-huh.

Mr. HABIP: I mean, there could be another Katrina in your neighborhood, and soon you will be a refugee.

So capping the number of refugees, I think, sends the wrong signal, despite security issues. We all need positive feedback at the moment.

Ms. JACKSON LEE: Thank you.

Mr. HABIP: That is all I am going to say.

Ms. JACKSON LEE: Thank you. I just want to expand on your point. Teaching one child expands that knowledge or that talent to their siblings and parents or their atmosphere. They could be in a refugee camp or could be -- and it just helps generate information all around.

Ms. Groves, those two questions. Thank you.

Ms. GROVES: Thank you.

In terms of what we leave behind, I guess, if this work doesn't exist: A number of years ago, I was in Dowlada, Ethiopia. It is on the Somali border. It was the second largest refugee camp in the world. That is now changing with the South Sudanese crisis. And we went because there was a significant challenge with the notion that across five camps, 200,000 Somali refugees, there was no organization working with a youth mandate. Refugee camps are often really well run, with solid child protection mandates, education mandates, health mandates. But what we were seeing there was there was no one with a youth mandate. And we went to do an assessment funded by IKEA foundation, one of our great partners. And we went. And we had a ball. And we had one of our great trainers come. And he started. All the sudden kids started, you know, checking out, what is going on? What is going on?

What is going on? Within, I would probably say 120 seconds, we had 300 kids and youth around. He facilitated one of our play-based learning games, which is about cooperation and collaboration. We had onlookers. We had kids that were laughing. We had kids that were learning. And it was something that had not existed in that space before.

And I think, for me, that is really what is missing. And it is the joy that all children and youth deserve to have in their lives and in some contexts is more difficult to experience than others. In that small glimpse, it was there. It was so profound. We have been in that setting now for 3 years and seen transformative change as a result. So I would say that.

In terms of refugee policy, I am a Canadian, flew in from Toronto this morning. So it might not be my place to comment on the United States' refugee policy. But I will say this. What -- Canada's response to the Syrian crisis, what I believe was innovative and what I believe was essential was that it wasn't only on the government to take accountability. It was on the public. And our refugee policy is one where individuals can band together in groups to financially support and provide that emotional support to a refugee individual or a family coming into that country.

And I think that that was important. Because I believe it instills the notion that it is not only somebody else's problem to figure out how we are going to solve this issue; it is all of ours. And Canadians have the opportunity to step up, and many of them did.

Ms. JACKSON LEE: Very good. Thank you. We have a base of private NGOs who are prepared to step up as well. Thank you.

Ms. GROVES: I bet.

Ms. JACKSON LEE: Yes. Mr. Johnson?

Mr. JOHNSON: I have been in refugee camps, a number of them, all over, including one that would take me into Pakistan, all the way up to Bora Bora. When I was in the camp in Afghanistan, I saw moms come into that refugee camp carrying their mats and a few pots and pans, and maybe no male, but four or five kids under her tow. The problem is, is that the arrival of -- into a refugee camp is not just a matter of providing housing or a tent. It is a matter of mom wanting to just get a break from her long travels, coming into that refugee camp, and to be able to, for example, have a play place area -- play area that she can have the kids go to so that she can prepare her tent, prepare her household, if you please, and someplace where she knew that the kids were going to be taken care of and not taken advantage of, a supervised play area, yes.

I have also seen that, around the world and visiting Zurich, in Switzerland, and

the UNHCR, that their request is, for example, that every single refugee camp has a play area. And they even requested us to do that. In the Zaatari refugee camp in -- that is the number one in Jordan, the number fifth in size, that one there is a well-organized camp, actually. And they have -- and where you think of refugee camps as nothing going on, actually, they have barbershops. They have stores. They have all kinds of economy going on within that camp. I am not sure that America understands what a refugee camp is. But what we ought to understand is that there is a huge need to have it well organized, well equipped, with safety for the people entering it, and with a place to play, a place to get educated, a place to get their food, that kind of thing.

And, secondly, as far as the number of refugees that we ought to allow in, I am really not prepared to answer that with any certainty. I don't know exactly what the limits are.

I do know that some refugees, when they come to America, are not received well. But they need to -- they deserve to be received well by Americans, and America needs to know that they are our guests and may be future residents of our country. We need to treat them well, with love, and with care, and not with disdain. And we need to speak well of those refugees that arrive on our border. And I am not sure that Americans do that. We give the impression that we are angry with them that they are here. And we need to make sure that they feel our love. I am not sure how many, however.

Ms. JACKSON LEE: Let me, if I might, just finish on this, Mr. Chairman. And I thank you and Chairman McGovern for leading the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. I am delighted to be a Commissioner.

I served with Tom Lantos and even had the ability, or the chance, to serve with him on the Foreign Affairs Committee and did a lot of work during that time on human rights issues. And so we are dealing with -- I just want to make the point -- and someone may want to make a comment, because it is dealing with play and education. And we can look at our own schools and our own children. And if we are fortunate enough, being as young as I am, to have little grandbabies -- they are grandbabies, so everybody knows how young I am. But they are 2 years old. I am just amazed, when I have the opportunity to see them, the joy of play. It is just amazing. And I have, as the co-chair of the Congressional Children's Caucus, began to talk in a language that when children go to school, it is their work. We get up and go somewhere. We think -- we are adults, and we say we go to work. But a child's schooling is their work. And when I say that, all the indicia of making it a pleasant place to work, or wanting you to go back, should be part of that work.

And so I think this hearing is crucial because it entails the joy of learning, as I wanted to talk about little Malala, who was just trying to go to school in Pakistan. I have been in Afghanistan. I have taken books, schoolbooks, to the children in

Afghanistan.

So I think this hearing is important, and the emphasis is important on how we can best either look to crafting legislation to be constructed and instructive, or as well to make sure that we view this as being very, very important and that play is very, very important. And in the camps, I would like to join in that with a play area in every refugee camp.

With that, let me thank all the witnesses for working hard to answer my questions.

I know Mr. Johnson was getting ready to tap his mike just for a second. I thank the chair.

Mr. JOHNSON: Could I just -- one more thing. One of the problems in America that we are seeing is that -- and you talked about the importance of play and play areas in schools in many districts. But we are finding that there are some districts that say: You can't have a swing any longer because the swings are dangerous, or you can't have a teeter-totter, or you can't have this. And if you take away all the elements of the playground that kids enjoy, what is there left? And I think that ought -- might need to be addressed by Congress and say you just can't take all the play value out of a playground because you are worried about the insurance costs or the lawsuits or whatever.

That is all I will say.

Mr. HULTGREN: Thanks. Good point.

Thank you all. I really appreciate it. I would love to stay longer. The reality is we lose the room at 4 o'clock, and it is 4:03. So there is higher powers that control these things. But really grateful for your work, first and foremost. Proud of you, grateful for what you are doing. I want to just encourage you to continue at it. And I would ask to keep in communication with us. We want to be helpful. We want to know what the proper role is. We want to be able to share with our colleagues what role we as Members of Congress ought to have in making sure that just wonderful access to play and education is available to every child here and around the world.

With that, we will adjourn. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 4:04 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]



# **APPENDIX**

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MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing**

### **Hearing Notice**

### **Defending the Rights of Vulnerable Children and Youth through Education: A Focus on the Role of Self-Teaching and Play**

**June 28, 2017**

**1:30 – 3:00 PM**

**2255 Rayburn House Office Building**

Please join the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for a **hearing** on how global innovation and technology are strengthening the rights of children and youth through education that promotes self-teaching and play.

Children are the world's most vulnerable population. They comprise more than 50 percent of the world refugee population. 5.9 million children die each year from preventable causes, nearly half of them due to malnutrition. Education is a universal right, and is key to empowering vulnerable children to overcome the effects of poverty, conflict, and disease.

Global technology companies, NGOs and individual entrepreneurs are developing original, creative solutions that not only improve the condition of those around the world living in conflict zones, extreme poverty and refugee camps, but teach children and youth fundamentals of development such as sharing, collaboration, and inquiry. Innovative ideas allow people within these contexts to access the knowledge needed to foster holistic development strategies and advocate for their own needs and rights.

What are the positive developments at the nexus of human rights and innovative education strategies, and can technology help? How can Congress bolster these efforts? Witnesses will present testimony informed by their experience implementing innovative solutions to address the challenges facing vulnerable children and youth around the world.

#### **Panel I**

- **Christopher Fabian**, Senior Advisor on Innovation, UNICEF

## **Panel II**

- **Denny Johnson**, Founder and Chairman, Kids Around the World
- **Lindsay Groves**, Vice-President, Program Development and Evaluation, Right to Play International
- **Hakan Habip**, Founding Chairperson, Science Heroes Association

This hearing is open to Members of Congress, congressional staff, the interested public, and the media. The hearing will be livestreamed via YouTube on the Commission website, <https://humanrightscommission.house.gov/>. For any questions, please contact Jamie Staley (for Mr. Hultgren) at 202-226-1516 or [Jamie.Staley@mail.house.gov](mailto:Jamie.Staley@mail.house.gov) or Kimberly Stanton (for Mr. McGovern) at 202-225-3599 or [Kimberly.Stanton@mail.house.gov](mailto:Kimberly.Stanton@mail.house.gov).

Sincerely,

Randy Hultgren, M.C.  
Co-Chair, TLHRC

James P. McGovern, M.C.  
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