

“Children are one third of our population and all of our future”  
Select Panel for the Promotion of Child Health, 1981

As an investment banker, I have learned to spot a sound investment when I see one...Perhaps the single most important and promising investment we will ever be called upon to make is in our children. And if we invest wisely, the returns will be truly remarkable.

Today’s children are tomorrow’s leaders, and it is important that we provide them with all the tools that they will need to succeed. And today, perhaps more than ever, their success is truly a matter of life or death for our planet. I believe that a key way to promote their success is to support and invest in Kids Parliament.

As we know, parliamentary debate is one of the liveliest and freest forms of expression around the world. It gives individuals an opportunity to be heard and well as to understand the viewpoints of others. Yet the ironic aspect about parliamentary governments is that they typically only allow the expression of certain viewpoints – usually of those who have been elected to office.

An essential part of our global population, and one that has a great deal to say about the future, are of course our kids - yet in today’s governmental structures there is no outlet for kids to express their hopes, feelings and concerns for the future. The mission of Kids Parliament is to build a community of children where they can meet each other, exchange ideas, understand and respect each other's opinions, while experiencing multicultural views in a moderated and peaceful way.

Firstly, let us examine the need for such a forum. Many individuals will question why such a network is necessary, arguing that children are unable to make informed decisions due to their limited experience with education or the events taking place in the world. Others may argue that parents should make decisions for their children because they can best represent their needs or “they know what is best for their children.”

While both of these ideas may be true in some context such as education or diet, children have the need to socialize and not just with adults but with each other. While political or economic situations may be monopolizing the headlines, kids have a way of bringing other viewpoints to the table, the issues that matter most to them. The opportunity for kids to have their own forum is a form of empowerment, as well as recognition that their opinion matters.

Secondly, let us see how the Kids Parliament is different from other organizations for children. It is essentially an organization for and run by kids; with a little help from adults. Rather than having a top-down hierarchy structure for the organization, we prefer to have a circle in which the communication and responsibilities flow into each other (see diagram on following page). Kids

Parliament is a decision making body with one representative from each country. The candidates will be elected from the Mega Community of kids that is comprised of the online users as well as the kids that benefit from this wide-reaching initiative. The Kids Parliament will also be assisted by the Secretary General and his Executive Team, which is charged with helping with the day to day operations of the organization and led by the Kids Parliament President, presently Hendrikka Wage. This entire organization of kids will be overseen by the Advisory Board of members that are invited to provide strategic support, guidance and promotion of the initiative. There is also an Honorary Advisory Board that has lent its support, expertise, time and celebrity status in order to help promote the organization; members include: Human Rights activist and writer, Kerry Kennedy; his Holiness the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso; Gunter Pauli, innovator and entrepreneur; Rabbi David Rosen; Bangladeshi model Bibi Russel; and Nobel Peace Laureate Betty Williams. The organization has an enthusiastic staff, high profile representatives and the dedication to helping children around the world.

Thirdly, we can look at the objective of the Kids Parliament and understand that its fundamental principles have kids' best interests at stake. The organization will help to teach the value of intercultural dialogue and well-being, and provide key values such as charity and environment. This dialogue might subtly lead to the second objective of setting up a kid exchange program where individuals are encouraged to visit their friends from other nations in order to take part in peace and understanding projects.

As a third objective, Kid's Parliament also will foster entrepreneurship by allowing kids the opportunity to set up their own projects; such as fundraisers in which the proceeds go to less fortunate children in developing countries. As long as it respects the parameters of the program, kids will be able to design projects. The fourth objective will be to help develop programs for the disabled so that truly all kids can participate in this global initiative. Disabled kids can teach others about their lives and can help to bring to the media's attention the plight of the disabled in both developed and developing countries. Once this group begins to participate Kids Parliament can claim to have reached everyone. The fifth objective, to provide free on-line learning content can also act as an engine for education and self improvement. Finally in the last objective, kids will have the opportunity to wield their power by participating in a best-practices program for governments in which they will rate their and other governments according to a list of factors.

### **The UN and Kids Parliament**

The United Nations has real potential to shape and contribute to the Kids Parliament. By creating a link between the UN and Kids Parliament, we can lend real credibility to it because the UN has such wide respect and recognition among kids. Secondly, it will be similar to the current "Model UN" in many ways but will have a wider appeal to a greater number of kids. Kids Parliament is open to

children of all ages and allows them to contribute to the blogs and discussions on the website or participate in the various events that are organized in different countries. While the Model UN does a superb job of introducing kids to the political processes and the exchanges between nations, Kids Parliament will be the opportunities for kids to participate in a variety of different events such as international art, music, entrepreneurship and leadership conventions.

Kid's Parliament can act as a beacon for the many kids who hear the call of public service. Often individuals are not able to participate in the political process until age 18 – by this age many kids have lost their zeal for politics, because their energy was not tapped and utilized when they were young. Also, while there are many organizations that allow kids to get involved in their local community, there are currently no organizations that allow children to participate and shape outcomes on an international level. Kid's Parliament will allow kids to be involved in the global community by creating this wide-reaching network.

Additionally, Kid's Parliament can serve as a sort of identification system for the UN and allow it to tap into the concerns that kids may have and/or face on a daily basis. With the "Best in Class" programs and "Kid's Opinion" surveys the organization can help adults to understand how kids in a certain country or of a certain age group are feeling about a subject. Rather than creating resolutions as is done in MUN, Kid's Parliament will be a great resource for the UN by helping it to understand and create the resolutions that future leaders care most about and deem necessary in this ever changing world.

The most impressive aspect of Kid's Parliament is that it unifies the most important private and public players to synchronize existing programs and create a more efficient system to implement the mission statement. After listening to kids and understanding their needs there will be a team ready to act on the decisions that they have made. Rather than making weightless decisions that do not impact the world, the Executive Board will work toward ensuring that the opinions and decisions of this body are known on a global media scale.

In conclusion it is clear that Kid's Parliament has incredible potential to affect thousands of kid's lives. As all projects are in line with the principle of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child<sup>1</sup> as well as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights,<sup>2</sup> we implore you to support such a worthwhile project which will motivate and interest children around the globe.

Take it from me: this is the single most important investment we will ever make!