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Pali Students Hold Human Rights Day

Last Wednesday morning, students at Palisades Charter High School arrived on campus to find five large canvas tents set up over their regular lunch spot in the central quad. During the school day, about 450 students visited this Children's Rights Camp, organized by the PaliHi Student Task Force (STF), a student human rights advocacy group sponsored by Human Rights Watch.

STF members decorated the inside of each of the tents to illustrate a different human rights issue: juvenile justice, access to education, the plight of child refugees in Darfur, unfair labor standards for child farmworkers, and discrimination against LGBT youth. The camp's overall goal was to raise support among Pali students for the protection of the rights of children in Los Angeles and around the world.

Pali's STF partnered with student representatives of the Latino Student Union and the Gay/Straight Alliance to create and deliver short presentations in each tent. After educating their peers on these issues, STF offered ways for visitors to support the protection of children's rights.

In particular, STF members circulated a petition at the juvenile justice tent in support of California Senate Bill 9 (SB 9), a law that would give incarcerated youth a chance to turn their lives around and earn a parole hearing. They plan to continue advocating for this bill in the months to come.

Many students also added their signature to a national petition calling on President Obama to support the ratification of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

STF co-president Zennia Esperanza, a senior, hoped that everyone would leave more educated about their rights and the rights of future generations, and that they would be challenged to take action.

Junior Julian Duarte, the STF co-president, was particularly moved by the passion in the voices of the presenters in the Access to Education tent as they talked about how cuts in state funding for education had affected them personally. This energy permeated into many of the student visitors, who flocked to sign the petitions and asked how they could become more involved in STF in the future.



Palisades High Student Task Force members Oscar Ruiz, Kenia Jimenez and Paulis Ramos educate fellow students about youth who are serving life without parole sentences in California state prisons. They asked visitors to take action by signing a petition supporting SB 9, which would promote fair sentencing for youth in California. Juvenile justice was one of five issues that students discussed at PaliHi's Children's Rights Camp on March 2.

Photo: Patricia Williams