



# OPENING STATEMENT



Mr. Chairman,

It is a great pleasure for me to follow-up on our initial report under the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and on the additional information we had submitted on issues in which the Committee had indicated an interest for further knowledge.

At the outset of my brief opening statement, I would like to introduce the members of our delegation:

Mr. Sadi Çaycı is an Associate Professor in the Law Faculty of Başkent University in Ankara.

Mr. Yüksel Erdoğan is a Judge in the Ministry of Justice.

Other members of the delegation include representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, National Education, National Defence, the Agency for Social Services and Child Protection, the Chief of General Staff, the Gendarmerie General Command and the Radio and Television Supreme Council.

Mr. Chairman,

We have submitted our initial report on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The pre-sessional Working Group of the Committee on the Rights of the Child has reviewed our report, and identified a number of questions – 14 to be exact – that



were communicated to us. Our pertinent authorities have examined these questions and have prepared the answers thereto which we have submitted to the knowledge and attention of the Committee.

Notwithstanding the merit of the contents of our written response, I would also like to emphasize the importance we attribute to be here in order to review together the documents and the wealth of knowledge generated by this on-going exercise. This importance stems chiefly from two reasons.

The first reason relates to the value we attach to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. As the first country in the world history to have dedicated a national holiday to children who represent our future, we firmly believe that children's rights occupy a very special place within the realm of human rights. We are also aware that the involvement of children in armed conflict, moreover, is an issue that is so unique in its abhorrence, that we were among the first countries to sign it. The Convention and its Optional Protocol which bring us together today are of great meaning for our efforts to build a better and safer future for our children.

The second reason is the importance we give to dialogue with your esteemed Committee. Within the context of the Convention and its Optional Protocols, our Government and the Committee are two parties striving to attain the joint goal I just mentioned – building a better and safer future for our children. It is only natural, then, for us to get together to discuss how we can turn the contents of these guiding documents into reality in a more effective manner to the benefit of our children.



Mr. Chairman,

It is with such a spirit and understanding that we have come here today to discuss our initial report to the Committee and the responses we have provided to the Committee's ensuing questions.

These questions and our responses cover a host of issues ranging from the withdrawal of our reservations to Articles 17, 29 and 30 of the Convention to rules and procedures governing the situation of asylum and refuge seeking children coming to Turkey from areas where they may have been recruited or used in hostilities, from measures against those who may be involved in under-aged military conscription to training provided to teachers at military schools.

The answers we submitted to the Committee are the compilation and amalgamation of information gathered from numerous governmental institutions. They contain a gamut of numerical and statistical data, as well as detailed information on relevant segments of our national legislation and practices. While they also engender responses that may not be perfect, such as the difficulty at this stage to withdraw our reservations to the Convention, we remain confident that they will present a more-than-adequate basis for us to conduct an in-depth dialogue over the situation in Turkey with regard to the area covered by the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

To give the members of the Committee a flavor of the responses we have submitted, I should like to note that



- the reservations we have to the Convention stem from documents that lie at the very foundation of our country, namely our Constitution and the Lausanne Treaty;
- our system is based on conscription at the age of 20 and thus avoids any ground for the admission of children in our armed forces;
- only persons above 22 years of age may be enrolled as Village Guards, precluding the possibility of children within this force;
- plans to include matters relating to the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict within the curriculum of the training courses offered to members of all segments of the judiciary have been developed;
- the Turkish police and military forces receive substantial training on human rights, including children's rights;
- teachers in military schools receive adequate training, that children in these schools have effective access to complaint mechanisms, and that these schools are rigorously monitored;
- that the Agency for Social Services and Protection of Children under the Prime Ministry has made all public offices as well as pertinent sectors aware of the Optional Protocol and that it has included pertinent information in its website that is open to the public;
- arms exports are subject to a number of safeguards that have been enumerated in our response.

Mr. Chairman,

In recent years, Turkey has made important strides in protecting and advancing children's rights. Legal reforms in this context cover a vast area ranging from



introducing the definition of “child” within our Penal Code, to the provision of health services to all children, regardless of whether they are within the purview of any social security agency or not.

These reforms have been bolstered by a very high number of conferences, symposia, panels and similar activities aimed at increasing public awareness and sensitivity towards issues relating to children’s rights.

To follow and review the developments in this field, Children’s Rights Committees have been established in all 81 provinces, and a Children’s Rights Monitoring Committee, composed of 8 Deputies, has been set up last year within the Turkish Grand National Assembly. This parliamentary committee, as I understand it, is a unique body in the whole world.

We are happy to note that these multifaceted reforms have begun making a positive impact on the day-to-day lives of our children—though we are fully aware that much more needs to be done.

Mr. Chairman,

I know that to qualify the Committee’s schedule as “hectic” would be an understatement. I will therefore limit my opening statement with the remarks I have just made in order to underline the philosophy guiding us on this matter and the motivation we have to work with you, and to summarize as briefly as possible the substance of our responses to the questions communicated to us.

Thank you.



# **CLOSING STATEMENT**



Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished Members of the Committee,

At the conclusion of the thorough and fruitful discussions we conducted this afternoon, I wish to thank each and every one of you for the warm reception accorded to us, and for your constructive and frank input to the dialogue we entertained.

We have listened with keen interest and attention to the valuable comments, observations, recommendations, as well as for the constructive critical remarks made by the Committee during the course of our deliberations.

Let me emphasize once again our strong commitment to further elevate the bar in the area of children's rights. While our resolve in this direction is closely related also to our pertinent international obligations, I would be amiss if I do not state that this resolve stems chiefly from our wish to have our children enjoy the highest standards in all aspects and dimensions of their daily lives. I would also like to put on record that today's meeting has provided us with a significant additional insight with regard to fields of focus and priority within the context of the forthcoming steps we intend to take to further promote children's rights in Turkey.

There is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of those areas where Turkey is open to criticism within the realm of children's rights are closely connected with the degree of efficiency and effectiveness with which our relevant sets of rules and regulations are translated into concrete action.





When we speak of human rights, as a diplomat who has spent quite a portion of his 35 years' old career in multilateral affairs, I do not have to remind you that no country is perfect in this field. Like all other countries, Turkey is well-aware of the room for improvement in implementation in the field of human rights. Sound consultation and cooperation among all interested parties at all levels will certainly facilitate overcoming implementation-related issues, and I believe our meeting today has set a fruitful example in this regard.

Upon our return to Turkey, we will faithfully share with all our relevant authorities the discussions we had today. What we take back from here will constitute a notable ingredient in our future discussions, considerations and deliberations at the national level in the area of children's rights.

Before concluding, I wish to also underline my personal conviction that the constructive nature and richness of our meeting today will not only serve to advance our common ideal to further promote children's rights in Turkey, but also contribute to ensuring an even closer degree of cooperation between our authorities and UN treaty monitoring mechanisms.

Thank you.

