



Child Rights Connect statement

Opening of the online 86th session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 18 January 2021

Distinguished members of the Committee, representatives of UN agencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Child Rights Connect welcomes the holding of this session of the Committee, as well as the fact that this session is using a new online platform in response to concerns and requests of the Committee and civil society. We also welcome the Committee's adoption of its first child safeguarding procedure. This is a very important step for the Committee, and for the UN human rights system as a whole, and we look forward to collaborating with you on its application, including to make it accessible to children.

Last year was a tough year for all and we, together with our members and other partners, greatly appreciated the enormous efforts of Committee members to continue many activities with increased workloads and challenges. While remaining fully supportive of the Committee and concerns raised by Committee members, Child Rights Connect is obliged – as a network organisation – to express regret over the Committee's decision not to review States during the current session. The Committee has rightly stated that the pandemic is disproportionately impacting children and that we are facing an unprecedented pushback, compounded – importantly – by decreased attention by States and the UN. Yet, as part of the UN machinery, the Committee is one of only two Treaty Bodies that has not yet decided to undertake online State reviews. Civil society is increasingly worried about the accountability gap, the mixed message this send to States parties, and the negative impact on the work of CSOs in affected countries. As we look ahead to the May-June session – which may well also be online – I repeat the offer made in September to support efforts to find appropriate and effective ways to conduct State reviews and adapt working methods, building on other Treaty Bodies' experiences.

Reflecting on the last few months of the year, 2020 concluded with some major achievements that I want to draw the Committee's attention to:

- a) We have institutionalized child participation in the governance of Child Rights Connect by initiating a 2-year pilot for the participation of children from our Children's Advisory Team in our Executive Committee. This is a major step forward for Child Rights Connect to become more effective in applying a child rights approach at all levels of its work and in empowering children as human rights defenders.
- b) We have published the implementation Guide: advancing the rights of child human rights defenders, which is a significant and direct continuation of your 2018 Day of General Discussion. The development of the Guide was a unique collaborative and learning process. As expected, the Declaration on human rights defenders allowed us to develop progressive interpretation of the Convention on various issues, such as balancing protection from harm and empowerment. One of the main lessons was that the perspective of child human rights defenders highlighted major gaps in the protection of the rights of all children, especially in relation to the exercise of civil and political rights. We look forward to discussing with the Committee how the Guide can be used to inform its recommendations to States.
- c) We also launched the first ever comprehensive Guide on the UPR for children, thanks to the collaboration with UPR-Info and different groups of children supported by our members and partners. We will now use this Guide as a basis for engaging more children in the UPR while continuing to build procedures and working methods inspired by those of the Committee. With time, we hope that this will lead to more and more UPR recommendations reflecting children's views which the Committee could build on in its monitoring work.
- d) With regard to OPIC, we published the Ratification Toolkit which has the potential to strengthen advocacy for OPIC ratification at national and regional levels. We also undertook the first ever training

on strategic litigation, in Latin America, through which around 60 participants (counting civil society, national human rights institutions and UN agencies) were able to learn about the OPIC and how to advance child rights through the OPIC and other opportunities within the UN human rights system. The training is ongoing and this year we will support participants to work on practical cases so that they can be empowered to submit strategic and admissible communications to the Committee.

We have shared with the Secretariat our work plan for 2021 and we look forward to discussing this with you in the upcoming meeting dedicated to that purpose.

I thank you.

Alex Conte
Executive Director
child rights connect