

Check against delivery

Committee on the Rights of the Child  
89th session  
Geneva, 31 January to 11 February 2022



Opening Address by

Mr. Orest Nowosad  
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Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division

Representative of the Secretary-General

31 January 2022  
Palais Wilson, Ground floor conference room  
10:00 am (Geneva time)

*Madam Chair,*

*Distinguished members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child,*

*Excellencies*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

On behalf of the United Nations Secretary-General, it is an honour for me to open the eighty-ninth session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

*A few personal words will be made*

We are pleased to welcome you in the digitally-upgraded meeting rooms of Palais Wilson. In the past months, OHCHR and UNOG have made a significant investment to equip these rooms with high-standard digital technology that integrates interpretation and webcasting on the same digital platform. As you will no doubt appreciate, this will give meeting participants, whether present in the room or connecting from remote, a more inter-active and modern meeting experience. This represents an important, concrete step in the Office's digitalization of all human rights mechanisms.

*Madam Chair,*

*Distinguished members*

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The eighty-ninth session was supposed to start on 17 January 2022. However, at the end of last year, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as the organizing entity, had to take the difficult decision not to hold the session in-person during the month of January in view of the dramatic increase of cases of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 and the unknown effects at the time. Subsequently, the Office confirmed that the sessions scheduled for February 2022 may take place with the treaty body experts travelling to Geneva to meet in person. Nonetheless, the Covid-19 situation remains serious and all the persons present in this room, members of the Committee and OHCHR colleagues, need to comply with strict hygiene and precautionary measures to limit the spread of COVID-19.

We understand your frustration, and those of others, with these postponements, which have a negative impact on the growing backlog of reports to be reviewed. Covid-19 continues to remain an unpredictable challenge, which never ceases to make our life and work problematic. We hope that the rest of the year can be more predictable thus allowing all of us to continue with the scheduled work.

*Madam Chair,*

Sadly, the Covid-19 pandemic is proving to be an increasing challenge to the lives of children worldwide. It is becoming a significant threat, with increases in the numbers of children affected by hunger, violence, poverty, mental health issues, forced marriage and difficult access to education, among other issues. This includes taking resources away from fighting other concerns such as malaria which infected 221 million people in 2020, whereby in Africa according to the World Health Organization children under 5 accounted for 80% of the deaths. All this could become “a lost decade for children, leaving the Sustainable Development Goals an impossible dream” if no action is taken, as mentioned in UNICEF’s latest report.<sup>1</sup> It is more than time to keep children at the centre in all responses to address Covid-19. The continued monitoring by the Committee in this regard is crucial.

*Madam Chair,*

This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the entry into force of the first two Optional Protocols of the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC). Two events shall take place between the end of February and March, each on one protocol respectively. On 24th February, an online panel discussion will reflect on the achievements of the OPSC in the past 20 years, and

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, *Preventing a Lost Decade*, December 2021

what is needed to secure its implementation within the current context, both with respect to digital advances, travel and tourism, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sale and sexual exploitation of children. More information on both events will be available soon on the CRC webpage.

*Madam Chair,*

I would like to congratulate the Committee for advancing its work on the draft general comment on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change. I understand that a global online questionnaire has been launched, inviting all stakeholders to share their voice on how children's rights are impacted by environmental harm and how States can ensure the protection of those rights. A child-friendly version of the questionnaire will be launched at the end of February. In addition to these online consultations, the Committee, together with its partners, will organize thematic consultations in February and March on topics ranging from the right to a healthy environment, ensuring a child rights-based approach to climate change, education and environmental rights, access to justice and remedies, to intergenerational equity and inequality resulting from environmental harm. I am very pleased to note that a Children's Advisory Team will be announced soon, following a global call for applications that closed earlier this month. These Advisors will support the Committee's work throughout all stages of the process, to ensure that the general comment is developed in an inclusive and consultative manner. I encourage all those interested to actively

engage in the drafting process, starting by completing the online questionnaire – if not already done – by 15 February. A draft general comment will be ready for public consultation later this year.

*Madam Chair,*

*Distinguished Members of the Committee,*

Since your last update in September 2021 on the 33<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting of the Chairs of treaty bodies, which took place in June last year, the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – the CRPD, who is the Chair of the Chairs meeting, has put on the table comprehensive proposals, in consultation with the CRPD, to be considered by the all Committees until the end of last year. I understand that almost all Committees have provided their input. The proposal of the CRPD and all contributions received are posted on the Chairs extranet.

In November 2021, the High Commissioner held a meeting with the Chairs of treaty bodies to touch-base on various issues, including the treaty body strengthening process. The Chairs outlined their respective proposals on the issues of (1) the development of a predictable review calendar that maximizes synergies and complementarities across treaty bodies and ensures full reporting compliance, including the possibility of replacing every second review with a focused review; (2) the ongoing harmonization of working methods; and (3) the

digital transition, including the use of new technological developments to increase efficiency, transparency and accessibility of the treaty body system.

The High Commissioner urged the Chairs that it was time for the treaty body system to come up with a consolidated and unified proposal, building on areas of commonalities in the three areas recommended by the Treaty Bodies review co-facilitators which I have outlined. She further encouraged them that the proposal should be bold and creative, demonstrating the engagement of all Committees in order to further strengthen and rationalize the treaty body system, and importantly attract the necessary support and funding from Member States,. She indicated that she is prepared to support them in any way she can, if and when consensus was reached, to take the issues forward.

The next Secretary-General's report on the status of the treaty body system is to be submitted for the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly. The Secretariat has already launched a call for contributions and it is timely that the contribution of the treaty body system be reflected as a comprehensive proposal that can be presented through the Secretary-General's report and costed to be considered by Member States. As the High Commissioner reminded treaty body Chairs, a proposal which comes from all treaty bodies on a consensual basis is stronger, and will have a wider reception and audience. We thus encourage you to continue your consultations on the issue in an inclusive and open manner, and empower your Chair to represent your views at the forthcoming Chairs meeting.

*Madam Chair,*

I will now recall recent developments regarding the rights of the child at the intergovernmental level. The Human Rights Council resolution will focus on the rights of the child and family reunification, which will also be the theme of the next annual full-day meeting of the Council on the rights of the child. It is scheduled to take place on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March. The High Commissioner's report on this theme, which benefitted from invaluable inputs from members of this Committee and from children directly affected by family separation, will be presented at the upcoming 49<sup>th</sup> session of the Council. The report, resolution and annual day will focus in particular on family reunification for children in cross-border situations of migration, armed conflict and counter-terrorism measures.

In addition, I am pleased to announce that in October 2021, the Office of the Secretary-General took the important decision to develop a Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming through an inter-agency process. OHCHR will co-lead in developing this Guidance together with UNICEF and other relevant bodies of the United Nations, in coordination with all stakeholders including this Committee, civil society and children. The decision reflects that a holistic child rights perspective must be reinforced across the United Nations System at all levels, in line with a Human Rights Based approach and system-wide initiatives including the Secretary-General's Common Agenda and Call to Action for Human Rights (C2A).



*Madam Chair,*

*Distinguished members and participants*

I would like to close by extending our and my personal best wishes to all of you for a successful and productive session and to say what a pleasure it is to be with you.

Thank you for your attention.