

Check against delivery

Committee on the Rights of the Child  
79<sup>th</sup> Session, 17 September – 5 October 2018



Opening Address by  
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Representative of the Secretary-General

Palais Wilson, Ground Floor Conference Room  
Monday 17 September 2018, 10.00 a.m.

*Madame Chair,  
Distinguished members,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

On behalf of the United Nations Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, it is my great privilege to mark with you the opening of the seventy-ninth session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Allow me to convey the greetings of the new High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, whose term began on 1 September. In her opening statement to the 39<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council she recognized how your work, in particular your recommendations, “are fundamental contributions to the work of preventing, mitigating and ending human rights violations – including the inequalities and discriminations which torment so many of our fellow human beings”.

Tragically, children continue to be tormented and maligned in ways which are inexplicable and demonstrate the dark side of humanity. They continue to be left behind. Trends that seemed improving, now are suddenly reversed as demonstrated in the case of global hunger. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018 report*, released last week by a group of United Nations agencies (including FAO and UNICEF), reveals that the number of hungry people in the world has been increasing for the third consecutive year, reaching one in every nine people. Twenty-two percent of children under 5 are still affected by stunting – this in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, according to research by Save the Children, more than half a million infants in conflict zones could die of malnutrition by the end of the year if they do not receive treatment. The failure to reduce world hunger is closely associated with the increase in conflict and the impact of climate change, which somehow we cannot grapple with.

Inequalities and discrimination continue to negatively affect children. Our recently deceased former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to whom we pay homage as to his family, wrote in the preface of his report *We the Children: Meeting the promises of the World Summit for Children*: “We were all children once. And we all share the desire for the well-being of our children, which has always been and will continue to be the most universally cherished aspiration of humankind”. This should not be only an aspiration. No child should be left behind.

*Madame Chair,  
Distinguished members,*

Nevertheless, not everything is negative for children's rights. Now that we are soon going to enter the 30<sup>th</sup> year in the life of the Convention on the rights of the Child, children all around the world are increasingly aware of their rights. Diana, 16 years old, has already worked on promoting and defending children's rights in El Salvador for five years. Stella is supporting the reintegration of former child soldiers and children born in captivity in Uganda. Ankit, aged 17, is currently the Health and Well-Being Minister in the Children's Parliament under the Young Advocates for Social Harmony (YASH) in India. Cameron from Scotland is a very active member of the Children's Parliament. He is 12 years old. They are a few of the 21 members of the Child Advisory Team, which is supporting the Committee in organizing the Day of General Discussion, dedicated to "Protecting and Empowering Children as Human Rights Defenders" to be held on 28 September at Palais des Nations.

The Day of General Discussion will focus on the protection and empowerment of children as human rights defenders in the context of the online environment and in relation to the role of State and non-State actors. Some dialogues will look at the protection and empowerment of certain groups of children for example children with disabilities and girls; others will deal with certain contexts such as armed conflict and humanitarian situations; and others will look at specific institutions and normative frameworks including the role of Children's Ombudspersons. A child and an adult speaker will moderate each of the discussions. However, this Day of General Discussion is only the point of departure for a long-term project to promote a global movement of and for children human rights defenders. Such a movement will catalyse and strengthen existing initiatives to empower children as human rights defenders, by connecting them to broader initiatives at national, regional and international levels. Allow me in this regard to mention the ground-breaking work done by Child Rights Connect to make all this happen together with the support of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

*Madame Chair,*

I am very pleased to see that the involvement of children and youth is improving in the context of the United Nations. A new UN Strategy on Youth will be launched next week in New York. The OHCHR Management Plan 2018-2021 will spotlight the human rights concerns of, among other groups, young people. There are more adolescents and young people today than ever before in human history and they are more and more constructive agents of change, although they are also the ones more negatively impacted by conflict and climate change and the neglect of our generation.

Therefore, the publication by the Committee of the *Working methods for the participation of children in the days of general discussion of the Committee on the Rights of the Child* is very timely. These working methods contain principles and guidelines that can be used by Governments, United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, NGOs, national human rights institutions, the business sector and other relevant stakeholders for the organization of other meetings at the regional and international levels including hopefully other treaty bodies. It is crucial to understand child participation as a collaborative process in which all stakeholders contribute. As demonstrated by the work done for the current Day of General Discussion, it is not a single event driven by one organization or actor.

*Madame Chair,*

*Distinguished members,*

As foreseen in article 45 of the Convention, the Committee can invite “specialised agencies, the United Nations Children’s Fund and other competent bodies” interpreted as including non-governmental organizations to provide expert advice and submit reports. Therefore, the cooperation with all these partners is absolutely vital for the work of the Committee and very appreciated. In this regard, I welcome that a number of agencies including ILO, OHCHR, UNICEF and WHO and Child Rights Connect are here with us today and will update the Committee on their work regarding children’s rights. This is an excellent practice which I am sure is welcomed by them and others who will engage the Committee in the future.

*Distinguished members,*

As you know, the thirtieth annual meeting of the Chairs of the treaty bodies took place in New York from 28<sup>th</sup> May to 1<sup>st</sup> June 2018. The meeting focused on the alignment of working methods and other areas of implementation of Resolution 68/268 as well the preparations for the 2020 review of the treaty body system. One of the outcomes of the Chairs' meeting was the agreement of the Chairs to propose the appointment of focal points in each treaty body to develop a common "treaty body based" position ahead of the 2020 review. They also agreed to explore further alignment of the simplified reporting procedure at the meeting next year. Furthermore, the Chairs endorsed possible elements for a common aligned procedure for follow-up to concluding observations, decisions and views. You all received the report of the Chairs' meeting, which is now available on the Office's website in all languages, and we will be available for any questions you may have in this regard during your session. With respect to the Simplified Reporting Procedure, our Office along with the Geneva Academy, with the financial support of Germany shall hold a workshop in November to see how this relatively new procedure can be aligned across all treaty bodies that use it.

The Secretary-General's report on the status of the treaty body system, together with the 24 statistical annexes, is now available on the website of the Office. The report highlights that the adjustments to the meeting time allocated to Committees has not been matched by the allocation of sufficient staff resources corresponding to the workload of treaty bodies for reviewing reports and individual communications. It also highlights that other mandated activities of treaty bodies, such as urgent actions, inquiries, follow-up and in situ visits are far more labour intensive than what was originally anticipated. Therefore the staff of the Office have difficulty to keep up with the proper completion of this work. This impedes the ability of the United Nations to support Member States in meeting their treaty body obligations and in fostering links between the authoritative outputs of treaty bodies and the prevention and sustaining of the peace and development agendas, for example. We look forward to addressing these challenges with all of you in connection with 2020 review and beyond.

With this, let me wish you a successful and productive session.

Thank you!