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*Madame Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Please also allow me to extend my thanks for the invitation to this hearing for the Third and Fourth State Report of the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC) today and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography in the session tomorrow.

It gives me great pleasure that we – the representatives of the Federal Government – are given the opportunity to discuss the national implementation of the CRC with the Committee.

The reporting procedure vis-à-vis the Committee of the Rights of the Child is a useful instrument for us. You support us in shaping our policies with the rights of children in mind.

It is an express wish of the Federal Government to continually monitor and observe the situation of children and youth in Germany: We want to know how children are faring, how the rights of children are translated into everyday life and whether such rights are accessible to Germany's children. We want to know what is required of us, so that all children and youth in our country grow up in such a way that they are protected, healthy and that their environment enriches their development.

The Federal Government places children and youth at the center of its policies. It is important to establish living conditions appropriate for children and to provide children and youth with perspectives for a future of opportunity. The CRC and its Optional Protocols provide us with important benchmarks, which we seek to translate into concrete policies.

The Third and Fourth State Report highlights that Germany is heading in the right direction in advancing the implementation of children's rights. This is a path that we followed persistently over the course of the reporting period. Our answers to the "List of Issues" demonstrate this engagement clearly.

A singular milestone has been the ratification of the new Optional Protocol to the CRC on a Communications Procedure. Germany ratified this protocol in February 2013, being only the third State worldwide and the first European State to do so. We are extremely pleased, that a tenth State ratified at the start of this year and that the Protocol can now enter into force on 14 April. The new individual complaints mechanism is an important instrument for the worldwide implementation and underlines the full binding force of Convention.

The dissemination and awareness-raising of the CRC and its Optional Protocols among children, parents and experts figure as an indispensable pre-condition for effective implementation. That is why in recent years the Federal Government has conducted and financed numerous projects, events and information materials with the aim of carrying the CRC into the public sphere.

For instance, we took the 20 year anniversary of the German ratification as an opportunity to bring together experts from all level of government and civil society to exchange views about the

In the asylum application process itself, all minors will be provided with a legal guardian. In this way, youth above the age of 16 will not be required to apply for asylum without assistance. In most cases, parents will figure as the legal guardians, whereas unaccompanied minors will be provided with an expert representative. EU legislation requires us to put these changes into law by 20 July 2015.

3. Monitoring of the Implementation of the CRC and a Central Coordination Mechanism

In its previous conclusions, the Committee recommended the establishment of a permanent central coordination mechanism for the implementation of the Convention as well as an independent human rights institution to monitor the Convention and to receive complaints on violations of children's rights. These recommendations have been subject to intense deliberations over the past years in German politics and civil society.

As we indicated to the Committee in the Third and Fourth State Report, Germany already possesses central mechanisms that coordinate policies on a federal and state level in accordance with children's rights. Hence, the cooperation between the levels of government on the subject of children's rights is already well-developed. A further coordinating institution would merely entail another interface but would not change the existing coordination mechanisms between the different levels.

The establishment of an institution responsible for processing individual complaints would have limited competencies as a result of the different layers of responsibility between federal, state and local level. In this respect, such an institution could only play a coordinating role. A more effective and more easily accessible complaint mechanism for children can already be found on a local level in many regions.

4. Child Rights and the German Basic Law

The previous recommendations of the Committee, to expressly anchor children's rights in the German Basic Law ("Grundgesetz"), gave rise to an intensive discussion amongst German politics, experts and civil society. As a result of these deliberations it became clear that the fundamental rights contained in the Basic Law, together with the Constitutional Court's Guidelines, have already included children's rights. That is why no more steps have been taken to expressly anchor children's rights in the Basic Law. We will, however, continue to engage in the discussion.

5. Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography

Finally, I would like to speak about the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. The Protocol has been in force since the 15 August 2009 and will now, for the first time, be covered here in front of the Committee. As it will be discussed in detail tomorrow, I will limit myself to general remarks only.

The Protocol supplements the CRC in a way that it obliges State Parties to implement concrete penal measures in the area of the Protocol's application. Article 34 of the Convention already carries within it the obligation to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. It also obliges States to take appropriate measures to prevent children from being either enticed or forced to be part of criminal sexual acts or that they are exploited for the purposes of prostitution and pornography.

The Protocol thus specifies the measures required to protect children from such exploitative practices. These are not limited to penal measures, but also include elements in regard to the prosecution of