**Committee on the Rights of the Child – 91st session**

**Opening of the session, 29 August 2022**

**UNICEF statement**

Madam Chair, dear Committee members, dear colleagues,

I am delighted to join you for this new session and welcome the opportunity to provide you with updates of UNICEF’s work of direct relevance to the Committee that took place since the last session.

During this period, we have continued to closely follow and advocate against the pushback against child rights.

In the June session of the Human Rights Council, women and girls’ rights, as well as gender more generally, were again at the centre of polarised debates, including over a resolution on women’s and girls’ participation. In total, 74% of all amendments put forward during the session targeted gender-focused resolutions. As in past sessions, amendments proposed by certain member States specifically targeted children as rights holders entitled to the enjoyment of their rights independently from their parents or guardians.

During the session, we also witnessed a continued lack of meaningful consideration to children. Throughout the session, references to children and to the specific human rights violations suffered by children were confined almost exclusively to interactive dialogues and panels focused specifically on *women and girls* – despite the obvious relevance of all debated issues for child rights. Other discussions, including those pertaining to migration, peaceful assembly, health, sexual orientation and gender identity, extreme poverty, as well as climate change, were all characterized by a lack of notable references to children. In many of these discussions, UNICEF was the only intervener drawing attention to the impact of the thematic or country issue on children.

The pushback against child rights is of course very much at play in countries as well, across all regions. We are currently collecting examples of these national manifestations.

In this context, we are very much looking forward to our Biennial meeting on 16 September, during which we will agree on joint action to elevate child rights including in order to counterweight this pushback. The Committee and UNICEF are natural partners in this respect, together with child rights civil society.

We also wanted to let you know that we are organizing an event to promote further ratifications of OPIC, together with the permanent missions of the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic, that will take place in NY on 12 September. The event, in which the Committee is invited to take part, will be an opportunity to update participants on the latest trends concerning OPIC ratification, jurisprudence and implementation; to provide positive examples of how OPIC advances child rights in countries; and to exchange and learn from national ratification experiences, in particular in terms of concrete impact on child rights.

And we wanted to share that, over the past year, UNICEF has been working on a Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) to accelerate progress towards disability inclusion in everything the organization does, consistent with the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy. The document was informed by a collaborative process involving surveys and consultations including with organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and children and with disabilities. It calls for accelerated action by UNICEF on the following strategic priorities: 1) prevention of stigma, discrimination, neglect and violence; 2) improvement of infrastructure, services, programmes and coordination; 3) access to community care and support services; 4) assistive technology and services; 5) disability-inclusive humanitarian action; 6) participation of persons with disabilities. It has been finalized last month and is currently being internally endorsed. Final approval and rollout are planned before the end of 2022.

The various initiatives of the UNICEF Human Rights Unit that I mentioned in previous updates are ongoing – including the development of child rights legislative guidance; a background report on policing assemblies involving children; research and programme strategies regarding child rights and sexual orientation and gender identity; and the update the Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and we will continue to engage directly with those of you who are involved. The guidance on UNICEF support to International Child Rights Institutions is finalized and will be launched at the end of September.

In closing, we would like to welcome the conclusions of the Chairs of the treaty bodies made during the Chairs’ meeting in June, in particular the shift to a predictable schedule and to an opt out modality for the simplified reporting procedure, as well as the call for greater resources for individual communications, urgent action and inquiries. We concur that these measures are necessary for the treaty body system to fulfil its crucial role in protecting child rights.

We wish you a productive session and look forward to interacting closely in the coming weeks.

Thank you.