**91st Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child**

29th August 2022

10 AM

Palais Wilson

**Opening Statement by ADG/SHS**

Distinguished members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you at the opening of the 91st Session of the Committee.

Children are our future. But today that future is threatened.

7.3 million children were displaced in 2021 because of natural disasters as the Climate Crisis burns on.

Over 64 million children remain out of the classroom blocked by discrimination, poverty, conflict and more.

COVID-19 has contributed to spikes in anxiety and depression, with 200% increases in mental health conditions reported amongst youth.

If we want a better future, one that honours the commitments made over 30 years ago in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we must invest in children’s rights and care.

It is through investments in children that we can begin to create a better future and tackle global challenges, as mentioned earlier. It is through investing in children that we can also begin to create more equal societies.

Recognizing this, UNESCO is pushing for the implementation of the rights-based agenda for children as a point of departure for radical change.

Education changes lives, but early investment and access remain significant challenges. UNESCO is working to safeguard access to education through a new initiative to fight for all children impacted by climate change to have continued access to safe, inclusive school. UNESCO is also promoting early investment for better learning and a brighter future through the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education.

Technology has opened up doors to new opportunities for children, but it has also led to new dangers. To support digital literacy and safety for children, UNESCO has advocated for children’s right to be respected online and provided support to ITU in developing training modules on child online protection, digital literacy as well as working on agreements on AI. The latter is part of a broader effort to frame AI development, based on the Recommendation on the ethics of AI that UNESCO’s General Conference adopted in 2021. The Recommendation is the first global instrument setting commonly accepted human rights-based principles aimed at ‘cracking the algorithm’ for greater equality and inclusion.

Considering how COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges faced by youth, UNESCO launched a Global Coalition of Actors aimed at changing the lives and prospects of youth, by adapting policies, building capacities, generating knowledge and supporting youth-led research and action with social impact, through a Youth Global Grant Scheme.

Taking into account the importance of physical activity, which has been shown to reduce obesity and depression by 30% and improve brain functioning and increase test scores by 40%, UNESCO launched Fit for Life to empower and encourage children and youth to participate in sport and quality education as well as provide them with safe spaces, coaches, and tools to ensure their protection.

One of the biggest challenges we face today is racism, discrimination and hatred tearing societies apart. Anti-discrimination and anti-racism are a cornerstone in UNESCO’s efforts to transform our societies and children play a central role.

Since December 2020 and the Global Call against Racism by its Member States, UNESCO is upscaling its action. We have developed an Anti-Racism Roadmap as an evolving strategic and operational framework, with key features including: our anti-racism masterclasses to empower students as changemakers with more than 6,500 youth from around the world benefiting; the Global Forum against Racism as an annual meeting point for collective thinking and experience sharing towards action; the Story Circles methodology as a methodology to foster intercultural understanding and the soon to be released Framework for Enabling Intercultural Dialogue; the revamped Routes of Enslaved Peoples Project with increased focus on contemporary racism and sensitizing children and youth.

Today, I call upon you to act. Let us invest in children’s rights. Let us invest in our future.