

Child Rights Connect statement

Opening of the online 85th session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 14 September 2020

Distinguished members of the Committee, representatives of UN agencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Child Rights Connect welcomes the holding of this session of the Committee, despite its limited nature but especially given the challenges faced in bringing together all Committee members in the online environment. The cancellation of the mid-year session of the Committee and the postponement of State reviews due to the extraordinary context created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the UN financial crisis has generated a concerning protection gap for children. Given the plethora of children's rights restrictions and violations arising in response to the pandemic, it is crucial for children that the Committee can fully fulfil its mandate to assess States' compliance with the Convention and its Optional Protocols. Appreciating the enormous efforts of Committee members to continue many activities with increased workloads, we remain concerned that challenges and constraints still apply, and that there is still a lack of clarity as to what work the Treaty Bodies will be able to carry out in 2021.

We stand ready to support efforts to find appropriate and effective ways to conduct such reviews moving forward and we likewise stand ready to support the Committee and its Secretariat in managing working methods during this period. We will continue to support the Committee and the Treaty Body Chairs by calling for increased availability, accessibility and predictability of resources and appropriate support for the functioning of the Treaty Bodies in the current context and in the long-term. We note that a number of States have expressed similar concerns and interests in supporting the Treaty Bodies to continue to effectively perform their fundamental mandates in the midst of pandemic- and financial crisis-related restrictions.

We too have faced challenges in the current environment and have had to adapt our working methods and the implementation of our work plan for 2020. I outline some key updates on our work since the extraordinary session of the Committee in Samoa:

- a) Early in the year, Child Rights Connect established a global Children's Advisory Team which is now a permanent structure within the organisation.¹ It comprises 12 child advisors selected using inclusive criteria developed with our outgoing child advisors. To respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Team developed a storybook, *Our Lives Under Lockdown*,² to spread positivity amongst children worldwide, and a briefing of recommendations to governments on how to realise child rights before and during a pandemic.³ We call on the Committee to take these recommendations into account in its work.
- b) We are pleased to announce the launch of our update of the child-friendly publication *My Pocket Guide to CRC Reporting*, available in English, Spanish and French.⁴ We hope you agree that this stands as a major resource for children to tell the Committee how their rights and the rights of their peers are respected in their country, as well as to engage in ongoing monitoring of the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols. The guide has been updated based on the working methods of the Committee on

¹ <https://www.childrightsconnect.org/our-children-advisory-team/>.

² https://www.childrightsconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/en_final_cat-storybook-2020.pdf.

³

https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/childrightsconnect/mailings/876/attachments/original/Child_advisor_draft_ideas_to_respond_as_a_Team_to_the_COVID-19_Pandemic_GOV_BRIEF_FINAL_.pdf?1597844899.

⁴ In English - <https://www.childrightsconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/crcbookleteng.pdf>; in Spanish - <https://www.childrightsconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/crcbookletes.pdf>; and in French - <https://www.childrightsconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/crcbookletfr.pdf>.

child participation and includes practical advice on the Simplified Reporting Procedure. It also better reflects the role of children acting as human rights defenders. As a next step, we are updating our guide, *Together with children, for children*, a tool for organisations empowering children to monitor and implement the UNCRC, and supporting related activities that are run by, with and for children.⁵

- c) As part of a multi-year initiative responding to recommendations from the 2018 DGD, we have begun in earnest on the development of a toolkit for child human rights defenders (CHRDs). As a central feature of this, we are now in the final stages of producing an implementation guide on the rights of CHRDs. This has been a collaborative enterprise with our Children's Advisory Team and key partners, and we are very grateful to the Committee members who participated in our online consultation in July to discuss an early draft of the Implementation Guide. We are considering a formal launch of the Guide on the 31st anniversary of the UNCRC in November this year. We are also working on a child friendly version of the guide, also aimed to be released this year, and are planning for further elements of the toolkit in 2021 and beyond.
- d) In July, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held its annual full day meeting on the rights of the child, focusing this year on realising the rights of the child through a healthy environment. For the first time, two children spoke during the panel, sharing their experiences in advocating for environmental matters. Although participation was online, the engagement of children was highly welcomed. At the September Council session, we are engaging in negotiations for the HRC resolution on child rights and the environment and we encourage the Committee to monitor developments.
- e) We have been following the 2020 process on Treaty Body Review and submitted inputs together with our members and NGO partners, including on a proposal for a fixed and co-ordinated calendar where each State is reviewed every four years through alternating cycles of comprehensive and focused reviews. We were pleased to see that many submissions to the Review Co-Facilitators supported the move to a predictable fixed calendar, and that both the focused review and the emphasis on civil society participation were supported by many States and by the Treaty Body Chairs. We strongly recommend that the Treaty Bodies move forward as one system and that this Committee moves to implement the fixed calendar as soon as possible.

In the coming weeks we will be developing our work plan for 2021. We look forward to liaising with the Committee Bureau and Secretariat as we do so, and we welcome any and all suggestions from Committee members as to activities that we might include in the implementation of our Strategic Plan.⁶

I would also bring to your attention the release of our public annual report for 2019. We have this year produced both a full report,⁷ as well as a summary (the latter of which is annexed to this statement).

I thank you.

Alex Conte
Executive Director
child rights connect

⁵ The existing version of this publication, published in 2013, is here: https://www.childrightsconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/With_Children_For_Children_WEB_english.pdf.

⁶ <https://www.childrightsconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/crct-strategic-plan-2020-2024.pdf>.

⁷ https://www.childrightsconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/childrightsconnect_ar2019.pdf.