



44th SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of the child

Panel 1: A healthy environment as a child rights concern: setting the scene

Key takeaways from the discussion:

The right to a healthy environment is a pressing issue. More needs to be done and very urgently.

Listening to the children themselves is of paramount importance in decision making. In this regard, the Convention on the Rights of the Child should be a guide for action.

A collective approach including states, international community and the private sector is needed.

Background documentation:

- [A/HRC/RES/40/14](#) Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 22 March 2019: "Rights of the child: empowering children with disabilities for the enjoyment of their human rights, including through inclusive education"
- [A/HRC/43/30](#) Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights "Realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment"

*Opening statement: **Ms. Michelle Bachelet** - United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights:*

Every year, 1.7 million children under the age of 5 die because of environmental factors. 12 million children in developing countries experienced brain damage due to lead intoxication. Infectious diseases such as Covid-19 are the results of environmental damage. Many of these effects caused by environmental degradation are **completely preventable**.

Survival, health, well being and development of children depends on a **healthy and sustainable environment**. Children's specific vulnerabilities impose specific policies from states, respecting the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**. Business also have the responsibility to protect children.

OHCHR continue to support children's rights and advocate for their causes. We will strengthen our work to make sure business actors adopt a child rights-based approach.

It is time for a global recognition of a human rights for a healthy environment.

*Moderator: **H.E. Mr. Walter Stevens** - Ambassador of the European Union Delegation to the UN:*

The thematic focus of this discussion could not be more topical. Environmental harm has a disastrous effect on children. Today, **we talk about the future of children**.

Last year, we celebrated the **30th year of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**. This convention requires states to take concrete measures to protect the environment. We all must try to do our part in the environmental action and implement environmental protection measures.

The **European Green Deal** is a good example of a comprehensive approach to address climate change. A zero-pollution action plan will be adopted by the EU and ensure a toxic-free environment. This green deal will aim at protecting our citizens and our children for their future. The EU's action against environmental harm on children is also part of its humanitarian assistance. The EU supports developing countries in implementing green policies and programs.

We must make sure the **voices of children are heard and considered in the decision making**. In that regard, the EU and GRULAC will present their traditional resolution on the rights of the child during the 45th session of the HRC. We have a duty to act, right now.

***Mr. Clarence Nelson** - Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child:*

The Pacific region is more vulnerable to the effects of environmental degradation and climate change: extreme weather patterns, rising sea level.

We must reverse the spiral of environmental damage and climate change. We have a **moral imperative** to act, for the sake of our children. The evidence is clear.

How can we safeguard the environment for the children and make states accountable? In the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, article 24 imposes a “*guarantee of the right to the **highest attainable standard of health***”. Article 29 states that “*Education of the child shall be directed to the **development of respect to the environment***”.

The right to health is indispensable for the achievements of all the other rights. This means the right to a healthy and a sustainable environment is inextricably linked to the other rights of the Convention.

We organized an extraordinary session in the Pacific, in Samoa in March 2020. It is an example of an innovative approach taken by the Committee. Climate change was the main topic of this session, which was described as a stunning success and could be a possible pathway for future treaty body sessions.

Dr. Maria Neira - Director - Environment, Climate Change and Health, World Health Organization:

1 every 4 children in the world dying today is because of **environmental degradation**.

We are concerned about new data coming up, on how **air pollution** is affecting children. We have an incredible number of studies telling us how air pollution is affecting the neuro-intelligence of our children. They can even be exposed intra-utero and affect the brain of the foetus. We need more than ever to look at the **causes of the diseases**.

How to join forces and work together? Many platforms are available. **SDGs** are a good framework to work on the main issues touching children: clean water, clean fuel, access to electricity. We need also to look at our transport policies and our agriculture.

The best way to build back better is to invest in healthy and green recovery. The WHO's prescriptions are:

- Better relationship with nature and our eco-system.
- Providing basic services (water, electricity).
- Invest on renewable and sustainable sources of energies.
- Build sustainable cities.

Junior - Child environmental human rights defender from Côte d'Ivoire:

We, the children, decided to create a **children's group**. The age average of our group is 15 years old. We have established **awareness raising and radio programs**. We regularly participate in advocacy activities, which allowed children to **make the link between business activities and children rights**.

The vast majority of us affirmed that **activities of businesses pollute the environment**. Cacao factories are next to our houses in Cote d'Ivoire, and the pollution cause many diseases.

38,18% of the 3.000 each year who suffer from skin diseases due to environmental pollution are children.

Recommendations:

- Establish more green spaces.
- Set up mechanism to gather complains from communities and children.
- Involve community and young leaders advocating for environmental protection.
- Support the initiative by children to promote their rights.

It was important for me, as a child, to **learn about my rights**. I hope the authorities take this question of the environment very seriously. If nothing is done, **all of your efforts will be burned by the sun**.



44th SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Discussion with states and NGOs

Webcast can be accessed here: <http://webtv.un.org/search/panel-discussion-on-a-healthy-environment-3rd-meeting-44th-regular-session-human-rights-council/6168523017001/?term=&lan=english&page=2>

States that took the floor during the discussion (23 states):

Estonia (on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic Countries), Pakistan (on behalf of OIC), European Union, Burkina Faso (on behalf of the African Group), Bahamas (on behalf of CARICOM), Slovenia (on behalf of a Group of Countries), Ecuador, Qatar, Angola, China, Saudi Arabia, Russian Federation, Pakistan, Senegal, Armenia, Tunisia, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), India, Namibia, Syrian Arab Republic, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Spain, Philippines.

NGOs that took the floor during the discussion (5 NGOs):

Child Rights Connect, Make Mothers Matter, International Planned Parenthood Federation, International Youth & Student Movement for United Nations, Institut pour le droit et le developpement.

