

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 55th SESSION

Annual meeting on the rights of the child

14 March 2024

The theme of the morning's panel was the rights of the child and inclusive social protection.

Ms. Nada Al-Nashif, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, highlighted that the report was accompanied by the first ever child friendly report to be mandated by the HRC. The contributions and perspectives of some 600 children were taken into account when preparing the report on inclusive social protection last year. The report emphasized the vital role of such measures in upholding children's rights globally. Despite this recognition, a 2023 report by the ILO and UNICEF highlighted significant gaps, with over 1.77 billion children lacking access to social protection, exacerbating lifelong challenges, and hindering the enjoyment of fundamental rights. The absence of social protection in childhood has a lifelong impact on children's wellbeing, their development, their health, and educational outcomes, affecting their enjoyment of human rights including the rights to life, education, health, adequate standard of living, and the right to play. While international law mandates such protections, barriers persist due to inadequate policies and implementation, particularly affecting marginalized groups like children with disabilities and those in alternative care. Nonetheless, promising initiatives in various countries demonstrate progress, emphasizing the feasibility of inclusive social protection. Achieving this goal demands legislative, policy, and budgetary commitments, along with international cooperation and a genuine commitment to children's voices and rights, ultimately leading to transformative change and equitable outcomes for all.

Sheila, a child national coordinator of the Analyt Network in Peru, advocated for youth participation in initiatives to foster leadership for positive change. Highlighting challenges such as educational barriers and discrimination faced by children in Peru, she called for government investment in education and support for families to ensure equal opportunities. Sheila underlined the transformative potential of youth involvement in creating a more just society, emphasizing education as a crucial tool to overcome existing gaps, including inadequate parenting, ineffective knowledge transmission, environmental neglect, gender inequality, and limited decision-making abilities.

Ms. Pamela Dale, Regional Advisor Social Policy for Europe and Central Asia of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) stated that despite progress, child poverty remains alarming, with 1 in 6 children globally living in extreme poverty. Access to social protection is lacking for 1.77 billion children, exacerbating inequalities, while gender and disability considerations are often overlooked. UNICEF emphasized the need for universal coverage, adequacy of benefits, child participation, and adequate financing to realize children's rights to inclusive social protection worldwide.

Marie-Reine, a 14-year-old from Togo, representing Child Rights Connect, underscored the challenges facing children's rights, particularly in healthcare and education access. Lack of healthcare facilities in remote areas and parental neglect contribute to children's health vulnerabilities, while early pregnancies hinder education, especially for girls. Building health centers, promoting universal health insurance, enforcing laws against sexual violence, and implementing comprehensive sex education to ensure inclusive social protection for all children in Togo are necessary measures.

Dr. Anshu Banerjee, Director for the Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Ageing at the World Health Organization (WHO), considered universal health coverage (UHC) to be highly relevant for children and families to access quality healthcare without financial hardship, yet global coverage remains insufficient, affecting over 4.5 billion people. Efforts to improve must prioritize primary healthcare and involve children and adolescents in UHC system design and

implementation to ensure no child is left behind. Additionally, ensuring access to nutritious food, safe water, and education, especially for out-of-school children, is crucial for the well-being of children, while addressing the needs of children with disabilities requires collaboration between health and social welfare sectors. Furthermore, attention to the negative impact of commercial marketing on children's mental health is essential. The WHO affirmed that it stands ready to collaborate with partners and involve children in decision-making processes to advance this agenda.

Interactive dialogue

28 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue.

The **majority of countries** acknowledged the vulnerability of children's rights, particularly within social protection systems, where various forms of discrimination disproportionately affect children on the basis of their origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, socioeconomic status and migration status. Efforts to prioritize children's well-being entail reorienting healthcare systems, eliminating preventable child deaths, promoting child-friendly services, safeguarding digital rights, and involving children in decision-making processes. Legislative frameworks must be improved to address root causes of vulnerabilities without discrimination. By adopting inclusive social protection legislation, policies, and programs, countries can create inclusive systems that protect all children's rights and well-being, reducing poverty, social exclusion, and inequalities while supporting families and caregivers in providing appropriate care and education. This collective approach is crucial for building a more just and equitable society for future generations worldwide.

The **EU** reiterated its commitment to children's rights and inclusive futures, emphasizing social protection and addressing systemic inequalities in collaboration with the UN. **China, India, Ghana, Gambia** and **Sierra Leone** stressed the urgency of addressing technology's impact on children, advocating for measures to prevent risks, protect privacy, mitigate addiction, and raise awareness to safeguard all children from online violence and disinformation. Emphasizing equality and inclusiveness, they urged international cooperation to bridge the digital divide, providing technical assistance and sharing best practices. **Egypt** and **Pakistan** condemned aggression against Gaza, stressing the plight of children. They called for an immediate ceasefire and respect for International Humanitarian Law to protect children's rights globally. Both emphasized the need for proper health systems and social protection in Palestine.

Lithuania and **Luxembourg, with youth's representatives**, remarked the importance of children's rights and inclusive social protection in ensuring a happy childhood and supporting children's growth and development. Urgency of addressing child poverty and stigmatization, requiring global action for equal opportunities through awareness and policy implementation is needed.

Ukraine underscored the need for inclusive social protection for children, particularly those affected by disasters, such as the humanitarian crisis caused by the Russian aggression. They referred to the invisibility of families with disabled children, facing barriers in education, social services, and medical care, urging continued efforts to create a safe and inclusive social protection system for all children, even in times of war. **Brazil** and **Paraguay** denoted the necessity to break intergenerational poverty cycles, ensuring children enjoy their human rights progressively.

NGOs raised alarm regarding children's poverty and limited access to education, highlighting significant gaps in social protection, especially pronounced in conflict zones. They emphasized the threat posed to children's rights by various actors, particularly concerning issues like sexual violence. Recommendations include prioritizing children's rights across various domains, incorporating sports, education, nutrition, and health. Despite these challenges, organizations remain unwavering in their commitment to safeguarding children's rights, guided by principles of child participation and the best

interest of the child, particularly for those facing intersecting forms of discrimination and vulnerable situations. Children's voices are essential and should be valued equally to adults. NGOs and civil society play crucial roles in advancing inclusive social protection for all children, ensuring environments where every child, including those with disabilities, can fully participate and thrive.

Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia in Spain encouraged equal access of children to essential services such as transportation, extracurricular activities, healthcare, and cultural resources regardless of financial status. **Action Canada for population and development**, expressed concerns about how policy choices, such as inequitable financial systems, undermine children's rights. Moreover, moral panics, like those in Canada, worsen issues such as child poverty and LGBTQ+ discrimination, rooted in colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal systems, calling for global accountability to ensure universal protection for all children. **International Movement ATD Fourth World**, focused attention on the necessity of birth certificates for accessing basic rights. Priorities should include simplifying registration, outreach efforts, integrating support, and awareness campaigns. **Eurasia press fund**, expressed regret over the violence against children in colonized regions, citing recent actions by French police and historical exploitation during colonialism in Africa, including forced labor and separation from families. French colonial policies, such as assimilation in boarding schools, deprived children of education, health, and cultural identity, leaving lasting intergenerational trauma.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (28 country delegations):

Albania, Iran, European Union, Timor-Leste (on behalf of Community of Portuguese language countries), China (on behalf of a group of countries), Egypt (on behalf of the Arab Group), Pakistan (on behalf of Organization of Islamic Cooperation), Gambia (on behalf of the African Group), Lithuania, Luxembourg, Nepal, Slovenia, Poland, Zimbabwe, Belarus, Ghana, Republic of Korea, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Jamaica, Ukraine, Trinidad and Tobago, Egypt, Brazil, Georgia, Togo, Sierra Leone.

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (11):

National Human Rights Commission of India, Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia, Fondation d'Auteuil, Action Canada for Population and Development, International Movement ATD Fourth World, China Ethnic Minorities Association for External Exchanges, Conseil National des Droits de l'Homme Morocco, Hope and Homes for Children, Amity Foundation, Beijing Guangming Charity Foundation, International Eurasia Press Fund, Rajasthan Samgrah Kalyan Sansthan.

To watch the full meeting refer to the [UN WEB TV](#).

The theme of the afternoon's panel was [child rights mainstreaming in the United Nations](#).

Mr Volker Turk, High Commissioner for Human Rights, underscored the urgent need to mainstream children's rights throughout the UN system, especially in the face of alarming declines in children's rights in conflict zones and global socioeconomic challenges. Mr. Turk committed to championing children's rights, acknowledging the clear demand from children for meaningful participation in decision-making processes. The Secretary General's guidance notes on child rights and Mr. Turk's office report outlined frameworks for action, emphasizing the engagement of children in all processes affecting their rights. States were encouraged to adopt child rights-based approaches and invest in capacity-building for child rights within the UN system. The goal is to ensure that children's voices are heard, and their rights upheld at all levels of governance, with a firm commitment to building a safer, fairer, and happier world for present and future generations.

Vasile, child human rights defender from the Republic of Moldova emphasized the importance of children's meaningful participation in decision-making processes, citing his own interactions with the UN system. He highlighted the significance of the UN's efforts in child rights mainstreaming, exemplified by the Special Rapporteur's report dedicated to children and youth human rights defenders. However, Vasile also pointed out barriers to child participation in decision-making processes. These include the language barrier due to the lack of knowledge of UN official languages, the absence of child-friendly documents provided by state institutions and organizations, and the issue of short deadlines set for consultations organized by state institutions.

Ms Anne-Marie Skelton, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, featured the Committee's grounding in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which reconceptualizes children as rights holders rather than mere beneficiaries. Notably, child participation has been integral to the Committee's operations, with children actively engaged in decision-making processes through state party reviews and general comment drafting. Despite challenges, concerted efforts are made to amplify children's voices, including collaboration with civil society to develop child-friendly materials. Moreover, significant strides have been taken to mainstream child rights across the UN system, evidenced by children's participation in the deliberations of other treaty bodies and collaborations with various mandate holders. Ms Skelton emphasized the ongoing importance of integrating child rights perspectives into all facets of UN work, including processes like the UPR, to elevate children's involvement and recognition on the international stage.

Ms Shaheen Sardar Ali, Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, accentuated the imperative of mainstreaming child rights within UN initiatives, particularly investigative mechanisms, drawing from her diverse professional experiences. Highlighting the need to challenge outdated perceptions of children's competence, Ms Sardar Ali discussed her involvement in the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, where prioritizing child rights became integral to addressing human rights violations comprehensively. It is key to adopt a "do no harm" principle when engaging with children, balancing visibility with protection. Ms Sardar Ali called for sustained support from UN member states and agencies to enhance children's engagement and visibility in human rights investigations.

Ms Pernille Fenger, Director of UNFPA, prioritized adolescent and youth rights, ensuring early access to vital services and information for successful transitions to adulthood. UNFPA has partnered with youth-led organizations, empowered advocates, and supported underrepresented groups, promoting comprehensive sexuality education. Initiatives like the global program on eliminating female genital mutilation were successful. Ms Fenger underlined diversity in youth participation, urging against

tokenism and advocating for intentional, transparent child rights mainstreaming. Collaboration between youth and decision-makers for meaningful engagement plays a key role in protecting children's rights.

Interactive dialogue

20 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue.

Most countries underscored the imperative of integrating children's voices into UN decision-making processes, recognizing them as distinct rights holders with the best interest of the child, equality, and non-discrimination as paramount considerations. Acknowledging the relevance of children's rights across all UN entities, efforts to mainstream children into international commitments, particularly by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, were praised. However, there is a call to further enhance children's systemic and inclusive participation in the HRC's work. Supporting initiatives for education access and upholding children's rights globally, states emphasized the importance of platforms for children's voices in decision-making. Yet, challenges such as conflict, climate change, and technological advancement persist, necessitating protection of children's dignity.

The **EU** stated that it has prioritized mainstreaming child rights, aiming for inclusive participation, and addressing vulnerable children's needs in their 2021-2025 strategy. The EU has supported UN advancements on child rights and remained open to further efforts at the HRC, striving for a world where all children's rights are respected. **Paraguay** stressed recognizing children as full rights holders and highlighted existing good practices in Latin America and the Caribbean to integrate their participation effectively. **Latvia** accentuated the importance of including child participants in discussions on global issues and underlined the need for the effective implementation of a child rights-based approach by the United Nations and member states.

Romania, with a youth representative, featured the importance of mainstreaming children's rights in UN and national policies, advocating for their voices to be heard and their rights integrated into global decision-making processes. By prioritizing children's rights, a future where every child's potential is realized, and their dignity upheld worldwide is possible. The **League of Arab States** and **Mauritania** indicated the critical issue of protecting children's rights amid ongoing conflicts in Gaza and other regions like Sudan, Yemen, and Somalia, emphasizing the necessity of mainstreaming children's rights within the UN. They stressed the importance of upholding human principles while providing comprehensive protection to children affected by conflicts, particularly addressing the situation in Gaza.

Botswana focused on the ongoing challenges to children's rights due to factors like disease and infrastructure damage, accentuating the need for robust policies prioritizing social protection, education, and health. Additionally, it emphasized the importance of peace agreements and sought insights on successful initiatives for mainstreaming children's rights. Upholding Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, **South Africa** stated its actively involve children in policy drafting and interventions, ensuring access to information and fostering genuine participation.

FAO underlined that as the 2025 deadline for SDG target 8.7 nears, 160 million children are still trapped in child labor, with 70% engaged in agriculture, impeding their growth and perpetuating poverty. It underscored the imperative for robust coordination and integration of child labor considerations in UN policies, highlighting the importance of data disaggregation, risk assessment, and adherence to do-no-harm principles to eradicate child labor and safeguard child rights.

NGOs urged the UN to prioritize child rights. They underscored the need for systematic integration of children's rights across the UN, offering recommendations for mainstreaming within the human rights pillar, including monitoring progress and increasing financial support. Additionally, they highlighted

the importance of legislation, law enforcement, education, community involvement, and non-discriminatory policies to protect children's rights universally.

The Scottish Human Rights Commission stated that challenges persist, such as addressing restraint practices and mental health support shortages, highlighting the ongoing commitment to child rights promotion and implementation. **World Vision, represented by a youth advocate**, appealed states to elevate children's voices to the forefront, urging that they become the defining melody and anthem of the future, drowning out the harshness of bombs and gunshots. **Family for Every Child** affirmed that in advancing child rights mainstreaming, the focus lies on authentic inclusion, especially for marginalized children. Emphasizing proactive engagement, the approach advocates for children to be active contributors, utilizing methods like digital storytelling and child-led research to amplify their voices and address violations firsthand, as exemplified by their participation in initiatives such as the Truth Commission in Colombia.

Save the Children International, represented by an adolescent rights advocate from Latin America, underscored the pervasive violation of children's rights in the region and highlighted the urgent need for safe and inclusive spaces for child participation. The persistence of stereotypes and adult centrism underscores the importance of meaningful engagement in decision-making processes.

The **International Eurasia Press Fund** and the **Legal Analysis and Research Public Union** condemned Armenian policy violations, particularly during the occupation of Azerbaijani lands. Traumatized children released from Armenian captivity during the Karabakh war feature the devastating impact, with many still missing or killed, reflecting the urgent need for Armenia to compensate victims and prioritize children's safety.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (20 country delegations):

European Union, Uruguay (on behalf of a group of countries), Latvia (on behalf on behalf of the Nordic Baltic countries), Qatar (on behalf of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf), Costa Rica, Ecuador, Spain, Romania, Cabo Verde, League of Arab States, Mauritania, Bulgaria, Thailand, Botswana, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Saudi Arabia, France, El Salvador, South Africa, China.

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (11):

The Scottish Human Rights Commission, Child Rights Connect, Save the Children International, Terre des Hommes Federation Internationale, World Vision, Family for Every Child, International Catholic Child Bureau, Eco Fawn, Centre du Commerce International pour le Developpement, International Eurasia Press Fund, Legal Analysis and Research Public Union.

International organization: FAO.

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