



GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Annual Discussion on the Rights of the Child

#HRC58 • 13 March 2025



BACKGROUND AND THEME

Pursuant to its resolutions 7/29 and 55/29, the Human Rights Council will convene the annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child, fully accessible to children and persons with disabilities, on the theme of '**priorities to advance a child rights-based approach to early childhood development**'. The panel is accessible to persons with disabilities through the provision of international sign interpretation and real-time captioning together with the other accessibility measures.

PART I

PRIORITIES TO ADVANCE A CHILD RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

OPENING STATEMENT

H.E. Mr. Volker TÜRK, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

In recent years, we have all seen appalling images of people suffering the horrific effects of conflict who clearly, when it comes to children who have been affected by conflict and obviously they have played no part in stoking the violence. People who could never be fighters or armed rebels or militia members because they are small children, sometimes babies. From Sudan to



Gaza, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Ukraine, **children are bearing the brunt of the global failure to uphold human rights.**

As international rights and humanitarian law are broken with impunity, children are the most vulnerable victims. Even in countries that are at peace, children are routinely denied their rights to food, water, and shelter, to education, healthcare, and a clean environment. Children make up a third of humanity. **Our experiences during childhood can affect us for our entire lives.** Children's small bodies make them more vulnerable to physical and environmental harms than adults. Upholding the rights of children is at the heart of our commitment to advancing and safeguarding human rights for all.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world. This shows the strong commitment of states to protect and promote the rights of every child without discrimination. Today, we must find our way back to that pledge. Some 80% of our brain develops in the three years after our birth. Early childhood development (ECD) is an essential foundation for a happy, healthy, and fulfilling life. This in turn is the basis for strong communities and resilient economies. Yet, the **gap between the Convention and reality is increasing.**

Many children face a precarious future as action on hunger, poverty, and the 2030 agenda falters, inequality, and climate chaos increase. In the next 30 years, eight times as many children could be exposed to extreme heat waves and twice as many to extreme wildfires. The digital divide means just 25% of children in low-income countries are online, compared with more than 95% in high-income countries. And children in all countries lack the protection needed to stay safe online. Decades of progress on children's rights and development are stagnating and even being rolled back, directly threatening children's early development and even survival. **Almost one in three children worldwide do not have access to safe drinking water.** Two in five children lack access to basic sanitation. One in three children under five are not growing and developing as they should because of malnutrition. Over 385 million children are living in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$1.90 per day. And for children marginalised by their ethnicity or their socioeconomic migration or disability status, the situation is far worse.

We are letting children down instead of lifting them up. We know what children need to survive and thrive, healthcare and nutrition, clean air and water, protection from harm, and a sense of nurturing and security. Initiatives that target the most marginalised children help to break cycles of poverty for the benefit of entire communities. But we also need to prioritise caregiving, play, and opportunities to learn. The interactions between young children, their caregivers, and the broader environment can be as important as access to food and clean water. A recent report by OHCHR found that today's caregiving systems are neither sustainable nor resilient. It called for a transformation to **align caregiving with human rights** and make it fit for today's world. The High Commissioner urges governments to consider a human rights-based approach to care by providing support for parents and caregivers and quality childcare for all.

OHCHR has prioritised such an approach as part of our commitment to a human rights-based economy in which all financial and fiscal decisions are aligned with human rights. **Investments in early childhood are one of the smartest ways to achieve sustainable economic development.** Studies indicate that the economic return can be up to 13 times the amount



invested. Programmes, including South Africa's Child Support Grant and the Bolsa Familia programme in Brazil, can help to ensure that children born into the toughest circumstances can still have the most essential needs covered.

Governments, of course, have the primary responsibility to fulfil children's rights. But the private sector, civil society, educational institutions, and many other stakeholders have an interest and also a responsibility when it comes to the well-being of children. We must all work together to provide children with the best possible chances in life. A **child's early years are a vital window of opportunity** and their life chances should not depend on luck. In these troubling times, we must stand up together for the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We must revitalise investment in children, all children, everywhere.

To conclude, addressing the children in the room, the High Commissioner gives his promise that his Office and himself personally will always stand up for children and all their human rights. Children are some of the most passionate defenders of human rights. OHCHR cherishes their energy, their creativity, their commitment, and their power. OHCHR is determined to work with children, not just for children. OHCHR wants to **amplify children's voices** and support them to represent themselves in all the halls of power, including at the United Nations. The High Commissioner is honoured to speak up for the rights of the world's children, and he will never stop doing so.

STATEMENTS BY PANELLISTS

Vlad, Child Rights Advocate, Republic of Moldova

Vlad is a 13-year-old boy from the Republic of Moldova. For more than a year, he has been working with the **Lumos Foundation**, an organisation which exists to ensure every child grows up in a safe and loving family. He begins today by encouraging the audience to remember the earliest memory you have from their own childhood. What were you doing? Who were you with? What emotions were you experiencing then? What did you need at that moment? And how do you feel now when you remember those things? At this moment, you may wish you had a time machine that could transport you back in time, or you may wish you could erase something that was and not remember it. No matter what we experienced and what we did, one thing is for sure.

We will never get that time back again. The first three years of life, but especially the first 365 days, are the most important for a child. It is during this period that the foundations of human development are laid with rapid biological, psychological and emotional developments. Basic needs such as food, care and affection, communication and education must be provided for every child without exception. **Raising a child is not a math test** that you can retake it if you have not done it right the first time. Parents, family and the community are the most important pillars of a child's first year.

But what happens when a child is born with a disability or into a family that does not have enough resources to raise them? Do we step aside because this is not our problem? Or on the contrary, do we help the child and the family to develop and overcome those difficulties? Lumos' experience in Moldova has shown us that this is possible and that child's difficulties, however great they may be, can be overcome or at least minimised. In the region where Vlad comes from, Florești, the authorities together with Lumos have been developing early intervention and



development services for children. Among those is the early intervention centre, which is a specialised service for children with disabilities and developmental difficulties.

The centre is open for everyone for free. At the centre, where Vlad has been running consultations with the small children over the past months, the children receive support from a psychotherapist, speech therapist, psychologist, social workers, doctor and many other specialists. They also got there to play and socialise with other children and their parents are involved in activities with other parents.

In this way, they understand that they are not alone in facing challenges and they build a supportive community and to make sure that **children with disabilities adapt more easily** in school and in the community, inclusive kindergartens have also been developed. In the kindergarten, the child has support from a support teacher, a speech therapist, a psychologist, but also from the educators and other children because the inclusion and acceptance is learned from a very early age. By having two services developed in the communities, the centre can directly help a child to develop their potential and overcome these difficulties they encounter.

Every child is unique and their goals and developments are unique. For one five-year-old child, solving a simple math problem is an achievement. For another child at the same age, the achievement is to be able to eat by themselves. During his time in the centre, Vlad met Lori. Lori is four years old now and has been attending the centre since she was five months old. When she first came to centre, she was facing significant developmental and cognitive delays and her mother has recently passed away. The little girl he met loves to play with her friends, recite poetry, draw and do puzzles. Her grandma, who is her primary colour, receives support from the centre parents network and has high hopes for Lori. Every child has their own peace and achievements and specialists, adults, the community and authorities need to be alongside, support and enjoy the results together.

From their experience of several years in our region in Moldova, the centre has realised how important it is to intervene early in child's development because **the earlier we act, the more changes we give to the child to develop harmoniously**. Finally, if we invest as many resources, efforts, people, knowledge, but also as much empathy and generosity in working with children, surely many years from now, if these children are asked like you, what is the earliest childhood memory? They would perhaps say, when Vlad was able to take his first step on his own, when he used to sing together with his classmates in kindergarten, or when he had the feeding tube removed. It is for those moments and memories that we must work together and remember that children are always ready to give the necessary support to cheer up our peers, but also to adults.

Ms. Najat MAALLA M'JID, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

Inclusive and accessible early childhood development (ECD) is essential, not only for the individual child, as highlighted, but for the well-being for the whole society. All children, including the very youngest and those in a most vulnerable situation, have rights that we forgot, including rights to development, protection and participation, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopting a child rights-based approach to **early childhood development** is key for recognising and respecting the inherent rights of every child from the earliest stage of



development. Investing in inclusive and accessible ECD, leaving no child behind, is key for sustainable and people-centred development.

Early childhood development is the foundation of **sustainable, people-centred development**. As a paediatrician, she knows how crucial a protective, safe, nurturing environment is to ensuring children's good health, nutrition, protection, early learning, and sense of belonging. The human brain develops wider and faster during the first 1,000 days of life than at any other stage. In the first few years of life, more than one million new neural connections are formed every second. Holistic nurturing care during this time is essential to ensure they reach their full potential.

Responsive care is particularly critical during the prenatal period through the third year of life when the child is primarily dependent on adult caregivers and parents. Healthy, positive interaction between infants and caregivers supports better brain development. Safety is a prerequisite for early childhood development. Early childhood programmes not only need to prevent violence, but also emphasise the importance of early detection and intervention. Nurturing and safe care take place in the context of families and through service providers across many sectors.

Health, nutrition, education, child and social protection that provides essential care for children to survive and to thrive. How children are parented or cared for in the first years of their lives can affect brain function for the rest of their lives and may even affect future generations. When caregivers, family members, communities and services are unable to provide young children with nurturing and safe care, children can experience severe stress and psychological deprivation, which can have long-term effects on health, learning and behaviour. The consequences of a poor start in life affect not only present, but also future generations. Many countries committed to the Pact for the Future. The economic cost is also huge with the loss of about a quarter of average adult income per year.

Investing in child rights-based early childhood development is crucial. Early childhood development services must be provided holistically across all relevant sectors to enable young children to thrive. Some countries have adopted multi-sectoral policies and are beginning to implement them. Other countries are expanding one set of services, such as social protection or pre-primary education, creating a wage for the introduction of other services. But there is still a lot to do to ensure that all children and mainly the most vulnerable have inclusive access to early childhood development. The responses are still fragmented, siloed and not put at scale. Many children with disabilities from minorities living in poor families or in humanitarian settings have no access to integrated ECD services.

Many families and caregivers are not provided with support for responsive caregiving, need to do better, faster to ensure that ECD policies and action place the rights and best interests of the child at the forefront of decision making and programme implementation. Policies must be designed in a way that guarantee access to quality early childhood services for all children, leaving no one behind. This means that the most vulnerable children with disability, children from a marginalised community should be at the forefront of our efforts.

Given the unprecedented humanitarian crisis due to conflict and forced displacement, we must ensure that **ECD programmes are embedded in the humanitarian response**. Support to parents and caregivers is crucial. Ensuring social connection and support in times of need will



help strengthen the resilience of parents in managing stresses and challenges they face. It means also creating safe, inclusive and equitable learning environment where children feel valued, heard and empowered to express their thoughts, feelings and to understand their rights. Listening to the voices of children is critical in creating programmes that take into account the needs and the rights of the people they aim to serve. Fostering the **exchange of best practises** among countries and communities is also important. We know what to do and how to do it. We have many evidence-based and cost-effective solutions to be brought up to scale and be shared. We must act faster to lay the foundation for a lifetime of well-being for the benefit of today's children, tomorrow's adults and for future generations.

Ms. Regina DE DOMINICIS, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia at the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Early childhood is a **once-in-a-lifetime opportunity**. It is window that shapes the child development in profound and lasting ways. The earliest years are the period when the child brain forms more than 1 million new neural connections every second. This is a pace that will never be repeated again. These early experiences lay the foundation of everything that follows. To survive and thrive, the youngest children need a **nurturing environment that is built on five essential pillars**: responsive care, adequate nutrition, good health support, safety and security, but also opportunities to play and learn.

But this critical period is also fragile and the risks are immense. The risks that we are seeing today are unfortunately extremely big. Poverty, conflict, climate change, environmental degradation, as well as health emergencies, all of which threaten young children's survival, development and learning, especially in this critical and sensitive early years period. Today, **one in three children under five is not on track in their development**. In low and middle income countries, only 25 of three and four years old receive the nurturing care they need. Under the 75 million children globally are deprived of early childhood education and 300 million children, two, four years of age, regularly experience violent discipline from their caregivers. This is really a wake up call. The numbers are really too big not to accelerate action.

Now is the time for an **accelerated investment in early childhood**. Investment across health, across education, across social welfare is not just an obligation, but as the High Commissioner was reminding us, it is a smartest investment that the country can make. It fuels economic growth. It builds a peaceful and sustainable society, reduces poverty, as well as inequality. **The earlier the investment, the greater the return**. We have heard that early childhood programme can generate a return as high as 13% per year. It's a compelling case, even economically and even for Ministry of Finances around the world.

UNICEF's vision reaffirms that optimal child development requires both strong sectoral investment, as well as cross-sectoral collaboration, as has been mentioned. UNICEF believes that every young child, wherever they are, must benefit from national policies, programme and parenting support that protect their well-being and unlock their full potential. At policy level, UNICEF supports governments in developing and implementing multi-sectoral policies and action plan. Solutions are out there as well as an incredible number of good practises. UNICEF also advocates for family-friendly policies and as well for families that help regulating alternative



care. They provide the flexible parental leave and working hours for both parents, as well as monthly allowances for all children under two.

At programme level, UNICEF collaborates with the rest of the UN family and with government to deliver integrated community health services and to accelerate access to quality early childhood education and care, both of which, as has been mentioned, are critical for optimal development. In **Europe and Central Asia**, home visiting programmes are now reaching over 4 million young children and their parents across 17 countries providing across support in health, in nutrition, in early childhood care. A lot of great examples that we can leverage for acceleration.

In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, similar approaches across 12 countries are helping tens of thousands of families, connecting them to the services they need. Recognising the central role of parent in child development is strategic and important and now digital technologies allows us to do that in a very effective way. UNICEF has developed a free parenting support app, for example, Bebo, that in a couple of months has already been downloaded by 1.5 million times and launched in 15 countries.

There are solutions that together we can scale relatively easy and at low cost. From Member States we really need an acceleration in ensuring the universal access to comprehensive child health, nutrition and developing services is ensured for everyone. As Vlad was reminding, it is important also to intervene early on early detection for children with specific needs. UNICEF stands ready to continue to work alongside governments, partners, communities and younger people. Let us continue together to ensure that every child gets their best start in life because it is their right.

Mr. Philip JAFFÉ, Member of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

Even though technically the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) only covers the rights of children from birth, it is a glaring reality that today early childhood is recognised as a period that runs from conception to birth, covers the first two years of life and it extends beyond until roughly five or six years old. For human societies to thrive in peace and for all its members' rights to be respected all through life, we must invest much more of our attention and resources in early childhood. The CRC Committee must also do more to lead the way. Anything less amounts to clipping humanity's wings. We often say that all child rights are of equal importance. Yet Article 6 of the CRC trumps them all as it calls on states' parties to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child. Logic commands that for child development to occur, the child must survive.

For a child to develop favourably, its **identity must be recognised and registered**. Just as importantly, a stable and secure environment must be provided to the child, his or her caregivers and community for good enough nurturing care of the child to take place. In the Committee's general comment on implementing child rights in early childhood, it specifies that this entails the provision of comprehensive rights-based, coordinated multi-sectoral strategies and services that states' parties must plan and implement across departments and central and local levels. There must be **special consideration for marginalised communities of children and children with disabilities and their families**. Also recall that Article 27 of the CRC recognises that children are entitled to a standard of living and social security adequate for their development. Briefly shifting to protection, for obvious reasons, early childhood is a risky period of maximum vulnerability.



It would make sense to expect that the greatest protection efforts are directed at younger children. The SRSG has called on investments in programmes to this aim and so has the Pathfinding Global Alliance on Ending Violence Against Children. At last November's Bogotá conference on ending violence against children, hundreds of pledges were made by states and organisations. At the conference UNICEF briefed on the incredibly dire developmental consequences of so-called **adverse childhood experiences** and the toxic stress that occurs and is produced that affects brain development during some adverse experiences such as armed conflict, forced migration, poverty, parental discord, etc. It is truly biologically amazing, this neuronal growth spurt that occurs during the early years.

Turning to **participation** as a fundamental principle of the CRC, it must be stressed that infants, toddlers, preschoolers do not participate in the same way as older children. Child rights mainstreaming does not favour the youngest of us. Any toddlers in the room? It takes a lot of creativity and human resources for early childhood participation. The youngest child that participated physically in a CRC Committee's session in Geneva was eight years old, and this was exceptional. Young **children's right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment**. Early childhood straddles young children alive today, but also future generations for the children that are still in gestation. That's a period of maximum vulnerability for **environmental toxic dangers**. Early young children's rights and the digital environment. Early childhood is full of privacy violations. For example, connected diapers and webcam observation in child care centres. An exciting advance is the work the UNHRC initiated last year on the possible optional protocol to the Convention on Early Education, hoping the work will progress rapidly. Last, one of the most important rights that requires a lot more implementation efforts from all of us in any capacity is ensuring and enhancing the **child's right to play in early childhood**. As adults, we are more working than playing. Just look at you. Early childhood is almost all play, and it is probably the best ingredient for harmonious development. Let us invest in early childhood development.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

For his first time in Geneva, **Vlad** noticed that the weather in Geneva is changing very often. Unfortunately, we people are also changing as often as weather, especially what is related to our promises and actions. Vlad really wishes that all promises made and intentions related to the early intervention and development of small children will be applied in practise. To conclude, we cannot change the weather, but we can change children's fate.

Ms. Najat MAALLA M'JID recalls children's voices 'We are small. We are small. Our voices should be heard and our dreams should be translated into decisions.' Those decisions should be turned into reality. Really regarding the facts, just to remind that children have dreams, but have rights. it is our duty and the policymakers' duty to translate all this into concrete action and all the points raised into real services that are easily accessible to all children, independently of their status and whenever they are.

Ms. Regina DE DOMINICIS believes there is a clear alignment on scientific rights and economic arguments. Can we make sure that every child goes to school? Yes, we can. And yes, only if we want and we work together. So let us accelerate both public and private investment in the right direction.



Mr. Philip JAFFÉ agrees that there is a convergence of perspectives that really is heartening. However, he draws the Council's attention to early childhood development in humanitarian situations, which should be a priority of the international community in the regions where children are suffering. In normal circumstances, a lot more has to be invested in ECD because that early scaffolding that society can give to families and children is conducive to children developing harmoniously with economic returns. That is just why should we shoot ourselves in the foot as societies? We should profit from the promise of the children and their harmonious development. **Child rights should not be a slogan. The dreams of children are their rights.** It is not more complicated than that. It is our job to translate those dreams into reality and not to forget them as of late.

PART II

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN EMERGENCIES: PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST

OPENING STATEMENTS

Ms. Nada AL-NASHIF, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

Our world is going through enormous changes and challenges from escalating conflict and climate chaos to political and environmental crises. These global events do not just change the present, they shape the future. And swept up in the middle of all this turmoil, **children bear the heaviest burden.**

Nearly **half of all deaths among children** under five occur in conflict-affected or fragile environments. War, disasters or disease outbreaks are taking a wrecking ball to the lives, development and futures of the youngest, most vulnerable members of our societies. Sometimes it's through displacement or the loss of opportunities. For others, it is exposure to the violence that thrives in lawless, fragile spaces or the deep psychological scars that are left by trauma. Around **one in four children globally are living in countries affected by armed conflict or high levels of violence**, where they face extreme poverty and deprivation. For them, war and suffering are daily facts of life, with devastating short and long-term consequences.

Children who endure violence, severe stress and deprivation during the critical early years, that is between birth and age eight, are more likely to suffer from cognitive, behavioural and emotional challenges. Indeed, and to experience developmental delays. Emergencies deny children access to their most basic needs, clean water, food, education, healthcare and shelter at the most important time for their development. Access to early childhood development services **can make the difference between life and death for babies and young children.**

When those services are disrupted, the greatest burden is placed on families already living in poverty and already staying within marginalised groups. Providing support to these children and their caregivers is essential. At the same time, monitoring past violations against children is vital to preventing future ones. OHCHR is playing a key role in documenting grave violations against children in conflict zones. In 2023, the United Nations verified almost 33,000 grave violations against more than 22,000 children in 26 conflict zones, marking a shocking 35% rise over previous years. This should alarm us all, but it must also spur us to action.



Every child captured in the chaos of conflict and crisis is much more than a statistic. They are our hope for a better future. When society fails to protect them, we forego our best bet to deliver on our common humanity. Prioritising early childhood development will prevent deaths, it will safeguard children’s healthy development and help to protect their hopes, dreams and potential for a positive impact. It will help to break cycles of poverty and violence, contribute to sustainable economic development and foster peaceful, resilient societies. We must come together to shape effective solutions that give all children the safety, security and services they need and the opportunities that they deserve in full respect for their human rights.

Joyce, Child rights advocate from the Syrian Arab Republic

Joyce, a 10-year-old child rights advocate from the Syrian Arab Republic, shares her personal experience of displacement. Ever since he moved to Portugal, Joyce has been really missing his home country, Syria, because it has his family, friends, food, the culture, cousins. Joyce wishes he would be able to stay there without shootings, missiles or bombs, kidnappings, but education, safety, child friendly spaces. He conveys a message to all of those who have been affected by the war or who have been in the war or have to leave because of the war – ‘stay strong and never, ever, ever lose hope.’ ‘We as kids, we are not fully developed by our brains, by our bodies, but we need to go to school, to play, have food, have water and most importantly, to not live in fear.’ Joyce really wishes to be in Geneva to tell the UNHRC his story, but he is not. Why? Because he is Syrian. Why should it matter? If he is German, Syrian, Palestinian or Turkish or a refugee? We are all kids at the end of the day. We are all humans at the end of the day. This should matter. Joyce calls on all world leaders to stop all the war so children can live happily and safely.

STATEMENTS BY PANELLISTS

Ms. Ilaria PAOLAZZI, Senior Advocacy and Policy Adviser at the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)

Education education is what children demand and also are entitled to. During armed conflict, **education is life-saving for children**, including the youngest. Yet this week, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Children in Armed Conflict reported that since the adoption of Security Council Resolution 2601, attacks on schools have increased by nearly 60%. Yet despite the increased targeting of education, it remains chronically neglected, deprioritized, and severely underfunded.

The sector is now at a crisis point, exacerbated by global cuts to humanitarian development and children’s rights funding, and the risk of losing decades of progress directly threatens children’s right to life, survival, and development. The latest global data on attacks on education and military use of schools are alarming. GCPEA identified around **6,000 reported attacks on education and military use of educational facilities** in 2022 and 2023, which is about 20% increase in comparison to the previous two years.

More than half of such attacks were attacks against schools, meaning targeted and indiscriminate violent attacks on all schools, including kindergarten, preschools, and non-formal education sites. In certain instances, schools used for sheltering IDPs or used to deliver humanitarian assistance. Countries most affected by attacks on military use of schools in 2022



and 2023 included Ukraine, occupied Palestinian territories, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso, Myanmar, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Syria.

Government forces remain the **main perpetrators of attacks**, which are often linked to increased use of airstrikes and explosive weapons in populated areas to which we know that children, in particular younger children, are especially vulnerable. Regrettably, the true scale of attacks on education and military use of schools is likely greater than numbers suggest. Whilst data has become more widely available in recent years, monitoring and reporting systems remain weak, absent, and increasingly underfunded. Additionally, data is not systematically disaggregated by age, which hinders efforts to understand and analyse the drivers and impacts of such attacks on younger children. In turn, of course, it undermines the prospects for accountability.

The UNHRC has expressed serious concern about the impact of attacks on education and military use of schools on children through several resolutions. The Special Rapporteur on the right to education has recently warned that the UNHRC that the effects of attacks are on the lives of learners are devastating. Children are disproportionately and differentially impacted and experience moral difficulties resuming their education after an attack. Around **72 million children were reportedly out of school** due to armed conflict and crisis in 2023, and this figure will likely increase in the future if attacks on education continue to rise.

The loss of educational opportunities due to war leaves children **more vulnerable to other violations**, many human rights violations, including forced recruitment and sexual violence, and has lasting consequences for their social and economic development, as well as that of their communities. There is evidence from neuroscience to economics that the early years of a child's life lay the foundation for long-term health, learning, and behaviour, and that weak learning foundations for children can compromise the long-term development of nations. **Girls are specifically targeted in attacks** on education, including disproportionately with sexual violence, and children with disabilities also face greater vulnerabilities and are uniquely impacted.

The CRC Committee interpreted the right to education as beginning at birth and closely linked to young children's right to maximum development, and has recommended that states ensure that **education in emergencies** is truly accessible and inclusive for young children through early childhood development and education programmes. GCPEA urges states to uphold their child rights obligations and take urgent concrete action to protect education during armed conflict and prevent violations of younger children and all children's human rights.

The **Safe Schools Declaration** is a tool that states should use to enhance and accelerate the implementation of the UNCRC and the OPAC. To date, 121 states have endorsed it. GCPEA calls on all states to endorse it this year, the very year of the 10th anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration and the 5th International Conference, which will be hosted by the Government of Kenya in November. GCPEA urges states to fully implement the Safe Schools Declaration and the Security Council Resolution 2601 with a child rights-based approach, taking into account younger children's unique voices, views, vulnerabilities, and evolving capacities. The Safe Schools Declaration Implementation Network is a unique opportunity for states to receive the necessary technical assistance on this regard.



Today is an opportunity to reaffirm that states have a clear obligation to ensure that all children, including the youngest, can exercise their right to education safely during armed conflict and crisis. Attacks on education and military use of schools must end. Early childhood development and education are the most effective strategies for states to achieve peace, security, and sustainable economic development.

Ms. Amina SHISHANY, Senior Project Manager at Plan International Jordan

Ms. Amina SHISHANY seizes this opportunity to illustrate the alarming situation of ECD for Syrian and Palestinian children in the Middle East. These children face unimaginable challenges due to ongoing conflicts, displacement, and systematic barriers to their rights, emphasising the urgent need for a gender-responsive and intersectional approach that prioritises the rights of all children, including girls, children with disabilities, and those from marginalised communities.

As a direct consequence of protracted crisis, **millions of Syrian and Palestinian children** are denied their fundamental rights to education, safety, and development. According to UNICEF, approximately 5.5 million children in Syria require educational assistance, with around 2.5 million out of school. In the occupied Palestinian territory, 450,000 children face urgent educational and psychosocial needs exacerbated by recurring violence. Despite these urgent needs, ECD programmes and emergencies remain **critically underfunded**. In Syria, for example, only 10% of the required funding was secured under the 2018 humanitarian response plan. More broadly, ECD accounts for less than 2% of total humanitarian assistance, reflecting a systemic failure to prioritise these interventions, particularly for the most marginalised groups.

Prolonged conflict has profound and multifaceted consequences for young children. Many experience psychological trauma, which severely impacts their cognitive, emotional, and social development. According to UNESCO, nearly **one in five children affected by conflict experience mental health issues** such as anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. Without structured support, these children face lifelong challenges in learning, socialisation, and well-being. Girls, in particular, are at increased risk of early marriage and dropping out of school, limiting their future opportunities and reinforcing cycles of poverty and gender inequality. In ECD interventions must be **gender-sensitive and inclusive** to ensure that no child is left behind. In both Syria and Palestine, girls and children with disabilities face compounding vulnerabilities. UNRWA reports that 25% of Palestinian children with disabilities lack access to education. While girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school due to safety concerns and societal pressure. Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions that promote gender equality and accessibility from an early age.

In **Jordan**, there have been positive steps in supporting young children through holistic, gender-responsive, and community-led approaches. Some of the initiatives that stood out included first the **First Step Big Step Project**, which was delivered in partnership with the Ministry of Health. This programme enhances parenting support and child care services within the health sector. The project applies behavioural science to improve parenting practises and is being expanded with national health authorities. It includes gender-sensitive approaches to caregiving, recognising the role of both mothers and fathers in early childhood development. Second, the **Senior Refugees Parenting Programme**, which was adopted the Health Early Learning and Protection Parenting Programme for senior refugee parents. The programme mainstreamed



gender reflections, ensuring that both mothers and fathers were engaged in raising children equitably, and challenged harmful gender norms from an early age. Third, the **Rawdati Project** was designed to prepare five- to six-year-old children from Syrian refugees and Jordanian host communities for school. Rawdati incorporated educational technology and interactive digital learning tools, recognising the barriers faced by girls and children with disabilities. The project integrated inclusive learning materials and adapted remote learning strategies during COVID-19 to ensure continuity of education.

These three programmes provide models that can be scaled up and adapted to other emergency contexts, ensuring that child care policies and interventions are responsive to the diverse needs of children. In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and SDG4 focussing on inclusive and equitable education for all, Ms. Amina SHISHANY urges states and humanitarian actors to take the following actions.

- Increase funding for early childhood development in emergencies, recognise ECD as a critical humanitarian priority, and allocate dedicated funding for early learning, health, and psychosocial support programmes.
- Implement inclusive and gender-responsive policies, thereby ensuring ECD programmes are designed to meet the specific needs of girls, children with disabilities, and marginalised communities.
- Strengthen local educational capacities, invest in local ECD providers, and train teachers, health workers, and caregivers to integrate child rights principles, gender equity, and trauma-informed approaches into their practises.
- Enhance data collection and accountability, and establish robust data systems to track the educational and developmental progress of young children in conflict-affected areas.
- Engage communities in early childhood development planning, and work closely with parents, caregivers, and community leaders to ensure that child care programmes are culturally relevant and locally owned.

In conclusion, the challenges faced by children in emergencies urge the global community to take action. It is essential to ensure that all children, regardless of gender, ability, or displacement, have access to quality early childhood development. As we come together, we should commit to changing policies and funding to protect the rights of vulnerable children and work towards creating inclusive societies that support every child's potential for a brighter future

Ms. Rima SALAH, Chair of the Early Childhood Peace Consortium

The **Early Childhood Peace Consortium** was formed and launched at UNICEF headquarters in September 2013. It is a global consortium of United Nations agencies, non-governmental organisations, academia, practitioners, and the private sector. It is focused on sharing scientific and practise-based evidence on the transformative power of early childhood development strategies and peaceful and cohesive societies. Unfortunately, we live in a very critical context where millions of families and children find themselves trapped in situations of violent conflict, military occupation, and displacement. UNICEF states that **one in six children are estimated to be either living in conflict zones or situations of displacement**. The number is increasing every day as war further unfolds in the Congo, Palestine, Sudan, and in Ukraine. The rights of children are being violated due to exposure to killing and maiming, separation from their families,



abduction, sexual violence, attacks on their schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian assistance. We should be alarmed by this unbearable situation. Most worryingly is the exposure of their families, parents, caregivers to instability and stress that challenges the ability of parents to provide for their children who need their protection and nurturing care.

What should concern and alarm us all is the **lasting negative impact of deprivation and violence** on these young children. Exposure to toxic stress and adversity at an early age is related to a broad range of negative outcomes that can occur across the lifespan, which can further lead to self-perpetuating cycles that continue for generations to come. But we can say with confidence that advances in development **neuroscience** and in an emerging, well-established body of scientific evidence from multiple disciplines hold significant implications for the future of millions of children living in fragile and emergency contexts. The good news and hope are that this **emerging science heralds a new era** with windows of opportunity through the investment in the positive early development of young children and their protection, and as a path to sustaining peace at home, in the community, and in society. Regrettably, in these very critical times, there is insufficient investment in the early years of life in emerging settings.

This is in spite of the **existence of good practises** and early childhood programmes that have been developed across the globe, from Northern Ireland to South Africa to the Ivory Coast, Türkiye, Lebanon, and Palestine, and from Nepal to Colombia. She has heard firsthand and has read many heartwarming stories from parents, and especially mothers who are participating in early childhood development programmes. Some report having become more aware of the importance of early childhood development and that their families have become more harmonious and peaceful. The programmes help millions of children reach their development potential. A mother participating in a women group in an early childhood development centre recently said the group helped her to forget the war. ‘We are all together. We won’t fight. Now my kids are in safety. We can be at peace.’

We must together **break the cycle of violence, deprivation, despair**, and protect children and their families from the impact of war and armed conflict. To do this, we must together raise the voices of resilient families, parents, and their children so that they echo throughout the world and in the conference rooms of the United Nations. Let them tell their stories of sacrifice and determination and to take their hopes and dreams in hand to forge a better future for themselves and their children. We must engage with governments, policymakers, and the international community to uphold the undermined rights of young children and to **mobilise increased investment** in the early years of life to mitigate the immediate and long-term impact of humanitarian crises on young children and to build a strong foundation for peace. We must ensure that early childhood development programmes and services are recognised as lifesaving and continued throughout the humanitarian response.

Finally, we must together maintain our advocacy to stop the war on children and their families. As a mother living in a war zone recently said ‘I wish the constant crying and screaming, the terrifying soundtrack of the war, would stop so that we can hear our children laugh again and just let them be children.’ Let us fulfil the wishes of every family and parent so that they can raise children of peace and reconciliation. She concludes by reaffirming the importance of collective action, declaring, ‘We are stronger together.’



INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

Views Expressed by State Delegations

H.E. Ms. Albana Koçiu, **Minister of Health and Social Protection of Albania**, states that when children have the best possible start in life, they are much more likely to grow up to reach their full potential. The Government of Albania has endorsed the national agenda for children's rights, which integrates health, education and social protection to ensure children receive the best start possible. Albania is actively introducing added social protection measures through the Universal Child Benefit, access to social care and integrated services and reducing child mortality. On this important agenda, Albania is closely working with our key development partners, such as UNICEF and others. The Minister further underlines is Albania's deep commitment to the ECD agenda, which is built around one simple objective, to leave no one behind, to make possible to all children the best possible start in life.

On behalf of the **Arab Group, Jordan** reaffirms its unified commitment to protecting children's rights in line with international instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Arab Charter on the Rights of the Child. Many Arab states have made progress in developing and implementing meaningful national programmes for children's well-being. However, ongoing crises continue to deny millions of children their fundamental rights. The situation in Gaza was described as the most dangerous place in the world for a child, with severe deprivation of basic rights and services. Similarly, children in Lebanon face critical challenges due to the country's economic and political instability. The Arab Group calls for urgent action to address these humanitarian crises and ensure the protection and development of children across the region.

Kuwait, on behalf of the **Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC)**, emphasises the need for international commitment at all levels to protect children's rights and well-being. Palestinian children are a stark example of the failure of the international community, with a call for intensified efforts and concrete measures to protect them and ensure the unhindered development of humanitarian assistance.

Ghana, on behalf of the **African Group**, underscores the devastating impact of humanitarian crises on child mortality, noting that nearly half of all deaths of children under five occur in such contexts. The African Group welcomes efforts to examine strategies for ensuring early childhood development in emergency situations, recognising that such initiatives are essential for safeguarding children's rights and futures.

The **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, on behalf of the **Member States of the Francophonie**, reaffirms its commitment to children's rights, recalling the 2019 resolution on the rights of the child adopted by its member states. It expresses deep concern over UNICEF's findings that 2024 was one of the worst years for the protection of children's rights. The gendered impact of crises on children was particularly recognised, with a strong call to uphold the dignity of all children in policies and actions.

Croatia, on behalf of a **group of countries**, emphasises the benefits of inclusive education for all children and asks which role can the UNHRC play in promoting a human rights-based approach to early childhood development.



Romania expresses gratitude to the Council for inviting children to actively participate in discussions, highlighting that young children are profoundly different from those shaping policies on their behalf and are far more vulnerable. The statement also affirms that children in Romania are motivated to advocate for the realisation of children's rights worldwide.

Mexico calls for increased awareness among parents and authorities regarding the importance of fostering children's emotional expression and the relationships essential for mental health. It stresses the need to ensure accessibility within education and to create safe spaces for children's participation in civic life, ensuring their voices are heard and valued.

Bulgaria aligns itself with the European Union, reaffirming its commitment to free pre-primary education at the national level. Internationally, Bulgaria is a core group member of the initiative to draft a new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, aimed at strengthening children's right to free education, particularly free pre-primary education. It invites all Member States to participate in the Intergovernmental Working Group on this initiative and expressed its eagerness to contribute to its progress.

Lithuania emphasises the importance of access to high-quality healthcare and education, particularly in conflict settings. It notes progress in reducing cases of child abuse, citing a decrease from 5,625 documented cases in 2017 to 2,877 in 2020, while acknowledging that further improvements are needed. The Lithuanian School Students' Union is highlighted as a key youth-led initiative, with active branches in 43 cities, demonstrating the role of children in advocating for their rights.

Slovenia's statement includes remarks from the President of the Children's Parliament, stressing the need for equal opportunities from early childhood and ensuring accessible services for all children. Additionally, the importance of exercise from an early age is highlighted as a crucial aspect of child well-being and development.

The **Marshall Islands** reaffirms its commitment to free and compulsory primary education while acknowledging the geographical challenges in ensuring inclusive services reach all children, particularly the most vulnerable. It calls for specialised services to bridge these gaps and urges engagement in the Intergovernmental Working Group to advance discussions on improving early childhood development policies.

Kuwait reiterates the urgent need to focus on children in conflict situations, particularly Palestinian children, who live in constant states of fear and trauma. It calls for international action to protect them from occupying forces. Nationally, Kuwait provides free, high-quality primary education and has implemented a 2015 law to ensure education access and broader protections against all forms of ill-treatment.

The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** emphasizes the significance of the annual debate, highlighting the critical importance of early childhood development (ECD). The delegation underscores the need for a holistic approach to ECD, ensuring consistent support for children up to the age of eight. The UAE stresses the necessity of greater coordination among stakeholders to enhance effectiveness in child welfare initiatives. Furthermore, the country has introduced a national law aimed at establishing a standardized and unified system to prevent poor treatment and neglect



of children. This legislation is also designed to facilitate better coordination and communication across relevant institutions.

Burkina Faso highlights the essential role of advocacy in fostering child-friendly policies and protection measures, particularly in situations involving violence against children. The delegation notes that the country has made significant progress in implementing the protocol signed with the United Nations (UN) system in 2022. This protocol has strengthened national security efforts concerning child protection, leading to the interception and rehabilitation of 156 children in 2023. Burkina Faso reaffirms its commitment to safeguarding children through continued collaboration with international partners.

Ecuador emphasizes the importance of addressing children's emotional well-being within a holistic and human rights-compliant framework. The country reaffirms its commitment to combating child malnutrition, with the national strategy *Ecuador Free from Child Malnutrition* remaining a top priority. The delegation stresses that a comprehensive response is necessary to ensure children's overall well-being, integrating emotional, nutritional, and developmental considerations.

Uruguay advocates for an approach to early childhood development that incorporates gender, age, and ethnicity perspectives while also addressing socioeconomic inequalities. The country highlights its long-term commitment to child welfare through the *National Childhood and Adolescent Strategy (2010-2030)*, which was established in 2008. As part of this framework, Uruguay developed the *Uruguay Grows with You* program, designed to strengthen the national child protection system. The program adopts a cross-sectoral institutional approach and implements targeted actions to ensure comprehensive child development and well-being.

Oman has implemented new measures to enhance social support, education, and healthcare, with a particular focus on improving the quality of life in low-income communities. The country has prioritised the provision of vaccinations to immunise children against diseases, recognising their fundamental role as stakeholders of the future. Oman emphasises that investing in children's well-being is key to securing a prosperous and safe future for all.

The **Republic of Korea** reaffirms its commitment to eliminating discrimination against children by adopting national policies and strategies aimed at combating exclusion and ensuring all children receive a fair start in life. The country has introduced inclusive social protection measures and is actively collaborating with UNICEF and other international organisations to strengthen child welfare initiatives. The delegation stresses that such efforts are essential for building a prosperous future society.

Bangladesh underscores the role of children as agents of change and highlighted its efforts to strengthen institutional capacity and policy frameworks to support child well-being at the national level. The country has implemented a comprehensive childhood care and development policy, ensuring support for children up to the age of eight. Bangladesh also operates extensive nutrition, and vaccination programmes and provides support to pregnant and breastfeeding women. The delegation emphasises the need for further evidence-based research and the exchange of best practices to enhance early childhood development initiatives.



The **Lao PDR** stresses that early childhood is the most critical stage of life, necessitating strong legal protections. The country has enacted a national law on the protection of children's rights, guaranteeing their safety from violence and ensuring equal opportunities for all. Additionally, the Government promotes child participation through initiatives such as the Lao Children's Forum and International Children's Day. A series of nationwide consultations, supported by UNICEF, have further reinforced the country's commitment to child welfare.

Paraguay highlights the need for policies that address both emergency situations and peacebuilding efforts to ensure stable and secure environments for children. The country's national strategy focuses on equipping parents, caregivers, and educators with the necessary information to improve early childhood education. The delegation stresses that empowering families with knowledge is essential for fostering a nurturing environment for young children.

Qatar highlights its commitment to early childhood well-being and development through its National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy (2022-2030). As part of this strategy, the country has launched a specialised certification system in collaboration with the Ministry of Education to provide targeted training for educational institutions. Qatar reports that 84% of children nationwide now have access to primary education, reflecting significant progress in educational development.

Senegal acknowledges the positive impact of international conventions in creating a framework for global child support while noting that major challenges persist. The delegation highlights that one in six children worldwide live in conflict zones, which disrupts their education, healthcare, and family life while exposing them to trauma. Climate change is also identified as a significant threat to children's well-being. In response, Senegal has introduced a national policy that integrates children's rights and has established a dedicated national agency for early childhood development. Additionally, the country has created over 200 new preschool institutions to expand access to early education.

Armenia's delegation emphasises that childhood is a crucial period for learning, growth, and social development. A child representative, speaking at the meeting, noted that while all children experience these formative years, their circumstances vary widely due to factors such as disability, conflict, and natural disasters. The delegation urges adults to listen to children's voices, as they understand their own needs best.

Botswana reports that its national approach to early childhood development is structured around five key domains: health, nutrition, caregiving, safety, and learning. The country has introduced an ambitious Immunisation Strategy (2025-2030) and an Accelerated Child Survival and Development Strategy, targeting children affected by worm infections, malaria, and HIV. Botswana further stresses the need for child-friendly policing authorities to ensure children's safety and well-being.

France, citing UNESCO data, warns that without decisive intervention, over 300,000 children worldwide will fail to reach the expected literacy standards by 2030. The delegation also highlights the situation in Afghanistan, where 1.4 million children - particularly girls - have been deliberately denied access to education. Recognising the gendered impact of such restrictions, France underscores its support for multilateral efforts and emergency responses. The country



has provided €120 million to international coalitions working to address these urgent educational challenges.

Speaking on behalf of a coalition of nations, **Vanuatu** stresses that cultural rights are inseparable from child rights. The delegation calls for renewed attention to cultural policies related to ECD, urging governments to safeguard children as the agents and transmitters of cultural heritage and identity. Ensuring the protection of these rights is essential for holistic child development.

Expressed by a Model UN delegate, **Malta** draws attention to the devastating impact of conflict on children. In Gaza, 96% of children reportedly feel their death is imminent, while in Ukraine, over five million children have been displaced, with half unable to access education in host countries. Malta emphasises that these crises perpetuate cycles of poverty and instability. Domestically, the country is implementing a National Action Plan for children, though gaps remain, particularly concerning migrant children. The delegation reaffirms its belief in children as key agents for a peaceful future.

Belgium's UN youth delegate stresses that while children do not start wars, they often suffer the most severe consequences. The delegation aligns with The Pact for the Future, advocating for a rights-based approach to ECD. Belgium has implemented national guidelines in support of this initiative. It asks how to effectively engage children in peacebuilding and how to integrate the principles of the Pact for the Future into national strategies.

The **Dominican Republic** underscores its prioritisation of ECD during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the establishment of an institutional plan for natural disaster response in collaboration with UNICEF. The country has also developed a national institution for comprehensive early childhood care. The delegation affirms that protecting ECD is a fundamental pillar of democracy and equal opportunity, reinforcing its commitment to sustained investment in child welfare.

The **Philippines** highlights its legislative achievements in establishing a comprehensive and sustainable national system for early childhood care and development. The country has been a pioneer in child engagement and participation, fostering children's associations and adopting the 2023 Guidebook on Child Participation. Despite these accomplishments, the delegation acknowledges the persistent challenge of insufficient funding, as financial resources are often allocated to immediate relief efforts and infrastructure reconstruction rather than long-term ECD initiatives.

Zambia reaffirms its commitment to ECD while recognising ongoing challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of trained professionals, and weak enforcement of child welfare policies. The delegation reports that targeted responses are being developed to address these issues, demonstrating the country's continued dedication to improving ECD systems and outcomes.

Cyprus aligns itself with the European Union's stance on early childhood development, emphasising that children are the most valuable members of society yet remain overlooked in national policies. The delegation points to disparities in access to ECD services and criticised the limitations of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, which hinders states' ability to provide effective and inclusive child development support.



Colombia stresses that language and ethnicity must never serve as barriers to early childhood development. The delegation condemns the instrumentalization of children in conflicts, highlighting the urgent need to protect them from being used as tools in social and political struggles. Additionally, Colombia advocates for greater efforts to educate children about peace processes, recognising that achieving sustainable peace and equality requires addressing broader structural challenges.

Indonesia reflects on the impact of the 2004 tsunami, which claimed thousands of lives and displaced over 6,000 people, with children at the forefront of the disaster response. Expressing deep concern over ongoing and new conflicts worldwide, the delegation stresses the devastating consequences for children. Indonesia highlights that in Palestine, hundreds of thousands of children have been deprived of access to education for at least two years, underscoring the urgent need for international action to protect children's rights in conflict-affected areas.

Bolivia stresses that ensuring early childhood development (ECD) has never been more urgent and must be treated as a global priority. The delegation highlights its national public policy 'With You' which focuses on child welfare and development. Bolivia also questions whether there could be a reconstruction of childhoods for the one million affected children in Palestine. This call underscores the need for global solidarity in addressing the impact of conflict on children.

Bahrain outlines its 2023-2027 National Strategy, which aims to enhance ECD efforts and create a more responsive and protective environment for children. The delegation stresses that children represent the 'weakest link in the chain' and must be provided with better opportunities to secure a brighter future.

Poland reports significant national progress in raising awareness about child safety. The delegation highlights new 2024 regulations, standards, and guidelines designed to improve protections within educational institutions. Poland has placed a particular focus on supporting children displaced from Ukraine, ensuring they receive the necessary care and access to education.

Armenia emphasises that ECD should never be politicised and calls for joint state action to ensure all children receive the care and protection they deserve. The delegation also highlights the increasing involvement of children in national peacebuilding efforts, demonstrating the importance of their voices in shaping a more stable future.

Ukraine describes the devastating effects of Russian aggression on its youngest citizens, particularly those under the age of three, who have known only violence and displacement. It paints a harrowing picture of babies hearing airstrikes instead of lullabies, toddlers taking their first steps in bunkers, and adolescents experiencing grief before they have fully experienced life. Statistics reveal the scale of the crisis - one in three children in Ukraine has witnessed someone being killed or injured, one in five has lost a loved one, and nearly a third have been displaced. Additionally, almost 40% of children in Ukraine are currently studying only online. Ukraine calls for accountability for the aggressor and reinforces the urgent need for international action to protect affected children.

China underscores the intrinsic link between the right to development and ECD, highlighting its national framework, which has been strengthened by successive programmes. The country has



established thousands of new, affordable kindergartens, now covering 90% of its territory, to ensure widespread access to early education. China also urges all nations to ratify the relevant international conventions on child rights, reinforcing the importance of global cooperation in advancing ECD.

Speaking on behalf of a coalition of nations, **Lithuania** emphasises the urgent need for meaningful international cooperation to protect children's fundamental rights. It calls for stronger global commitments to ensure comprehensive child protection measures are implemented effectively.

India highlights the lifelong benefits of early childhood development (ECD) and reaffirms its deep commitment to supporting child welfare. It notes that 50 years ago, India launched one of the world's largest community-based programmes offering integrated child development services. Today, this initiative benefits over 70 million people, including children. Additionally, India underscores its National Nutrition Initiative, which plays a key role in improving child health and wellbeing.

Spain stresses that the international community must not compromise on its promise to future generations, as outlined in The Pact for the Future. It emphasises that compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child must remain unwavering. Spain's constitution explicitly recognises children's rights, and the country has enacted legislation to strengthen child protection. Spain also continues to develop initiatives promoting both ECD and youth participation.

Venezuela refers to Article 78 of its constitution, which guarantees children's rights and mandates state protection. It condemns the impact of unilateral coercive measures on children's wellbeing and questions what steps international bodies have taken to end these restrictions. Venezuela also strongly denounces the actions of Israel in Palestine, stating that over 16,000 children have been killed and more than 6,000 injured since 2023, with numbers expected to rise further. It calls for urgent international action to address what it termed genocide.

Cabo Verde advocates for increased global investment in EC and reports that as a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it has recently introduced new measures to enhance child protection and amended its penal code to strengthen legal safeguards for children.

Rwanda highlights the work of its National Child Development Agency, established in August 2020, which has prioritised participation in international discussions on ECD. Reaffirming its endorsement of a human rights-based approach to child development, Rwanda stresses the importance of global collaboration to ensure sustainable progress in ECD initiatives.

Algeria highlights its 2015 Law on the Protection of Children, which aims to safeguard children from neglect and ensure their right to early childhood development (ECD). The delegation underscores the moral responsibility of the international community to protect children in conflict situations, stressing that ECD is not possible in war zones. Algeria calls for immediate action regarding the situation in Gaza, emphasising that investment must be directed towards peace and societal stability to secure children's futures.



Ms. Manijeh Khaki Bakhtyarvand, **Deputy of the Judiciary of Iran**, reaffirms the country's commitment to continuously developing policies and strategies to improve the conditions for children, particularly those living in crisis situations. Iran has worked closely with UNICEF and taken steps to ensure no child is left behind, including - Establishing a National Education Organisation with a focus on ECD, Nationalising vaccination programmes, Implementing targeted health packages, Providing coverage for migrant children, and Ensuring free and equal access to education. Iran strongly condemns the suffering of children in Gaza, stating they are bearing the brunt of 75 years of occupation by what it called the genocidal state of Israel. The delegation describes the situation as the worst case of child suffering globally.

The **Russian Federation** reaffirms its commitment to ECD both nationally and internationally, describing the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a guiding star in shaping policy. Despite facing international sanctions, Russia reports successful implementation of its National State Programme for Children, set to run until 2027. This programme prioritises child health, prosperity, and education. The delegation opposes what it termed dubious legal and thematic innovations being introduced at the international level without broad consensus.

El Salvador outlines its holistic legal and policy framework for child protection, known as Living Together, which is being spearheaded by the country's First Lady. The delegation calls for greater international cooperation and implementation of ECD initiatives. Stressing that ECD is the bedrock of both the present and future, El Salvador urges the global community to ensure that all children have the opportunity to develop fully in life.

Views Expressed by Inter-Governmental Organizations

According to the **European Union**, early childhood shapes a child's future and is the foundation of lifelong learning, health and well-being. As independent rights holders, all children are entitled to education, care and protection from the start. By ensuring access to quality early childhood development, we invest in stronger, more equitable societies and ensure the respect, protection and fulfilment of the right of every child, enabling them to reach their full potential. Every child should have access to high quality and affordable early childhood education and care. For the European Union, this is a commitment outlined in the European Pillar of Social Rights and in the Council Recommendations on Early Childhood Education and Care. This has already led to reforms across member states, achieving the EU target of 95% enrolment for children over four years in early education. Furthermore, the European Child Guarantee ensures children at risk of poverty or exclusion receive free early childhood education, health care, nutrition and housing. This commitment, backed by EU funding, is a crucial step towards breaking cycles of disadvantage. By prioritising early childhood development, we uphold children's rights, create equal opportunities and build a stronger future for all.

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** points out that the nurturing care framework was launched by WHO, UNICEF, the World Bank and partners. Since then, they have witnessed transformative progress in early childhood development. The framework has fostered a shared understanding of what children need to thrive through a whole of government and whole of society approach. The health sector, often the first point of contact for our youngest children, plays a pivotal role in ensuring they receive the best start in life. WHO is collaborating with member states to strengthen their health and nutrition services and support parents in creating



environments that promote their children's development. Since 2018, the number of countries with national policies or action plans for ECD has increased by 48 percent, reflecting a growing commitment to nurturing care. Central to this commitment is the recognition of every child's fundamental right to health and development. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that children not only survive, but thrive in environments that support their holistic development. Moving forward, we must deepen collaboration across sectors to ensure coordinated, people-centred services and continuity of care. We need to cultivate a health workforce fit for purpose, strengthen referral pathways for timely support, and use data to inform action. WHO calls on states to invest more in every child's health and development by creating enabling environments and employing a whole-of-government and society approach. This is crucial to ensuring that every child, including those in conflict and humanitarian settings, enjoys their right to health and development.

The **Council of Europe (CoE)** reiterates that children's rights in emergency situations are one of the six priorities outlined in its Strategy on the Rights of the Child, adopted just one day before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The CoE has been actively engaged in supporting Ukrainian children, including through the establishment of the Ukrainian Children's Consultation Group. It has also collaborated with the Special Envoy for Children of Ukraine to provide further assistance.

Views Expressed by National Human Rights Institutions

The **Qatar National Human Rights Commission** emphasises the urgent need to combat domestic violence and create a safe digital environment for children. The Commission hosted the Third National Forum on this theme, providing training to key public institutions. It calls for extending such initiatives and best practices to the international level to enhance global child protection in digital spaces.

Views Expressed by Non-Governmental Organizations

A child human rights defender speaking on behalf of **Child Rights Connect** stresses that family is the most important factor in child development. The organisation highlights the need for parental engagement and warned against trivialising or marginalising children's voices, calling for their active inclusion in decision-making processes.

The **Chinese Association for International Understanding** notes that Chinese NGOs have increasingly collaborated with international organisations to promote the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the SDGs. The China Academy of Medical Science pioneered radiation-free screening services for children, improving early detection of medical conditions. Additionally, China's NGO network has facilitated international exchanges, including the donation of mobile surgical units to Tanzania, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Thailand, working closely with local practitioners to address birth defects.

Make Mothers Matter highlights the unpaid work gap experienced by mothers and calls for greater support for single-parent households. The organisation also stresses the importance of encouraging father involvement in early childhood development to ensure a balanced and nurturing upbringing.



The **International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education (OIDEL)** underscores the positive impact of parental nurture on ECD, stressing the need for trust between parents and institutions. It calls for the inclusion of non-mainstream families in education and policy frameworks, emphasising that parents should be given due respect in shaping opportunities for their children.

Representing the **Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia**, seven-year-old Jared, from the Canary Islands, highlights the importance of a supportive family that cares, protects, listens, and values children's opinions. He also stresses the necessity of education, particularly for children who have migrated and face language barriers. The organisation calls for stronger child rights protections.

The **Fondation d'Auteuil** shares a testimony from a struggling mother who told a social worker, 'I cannot even look at my baby.' The statement illustrates the immense emotional and physical burdens faced by parents. The organisation stresses that parents need time and support to engage fully with their children, and that children must have the freedom to move and develop in a healthy environment.

Arigatou International reports that six in ten children experience physical and psychological abuse by caregivers. The organisation calls for urgent action to address emotional, mental, and spiritual needs early in life. It advocates for informing parents on the harmful impact of violence and the importance of positive discipline. Additionally, it stresses the need to engage faith and religious leaders to combat exclusion and hate in communities.

The **Lumos Foundation** highlights the negative impact of orphanages on children's emotional, cognitive, and physical development. It stresses that institutionalisation and family separation hinder healthy development and called for a shift towards community-based approaches. The organisation strongly advocates for family-based care as a more effective and nurturing alternative.

The **Beijing NGO Association for International Exchanges** emphasises the diverse range of services provided by NGOs in supporting early childhood development. It expresses a commitment to sharing best practices to enhance international collaboration and improve outcomes for children worldwide.

Asociación HazteOir.org asserts that parents have the right to make informed decisions about their children's development. It calls for greater transparency in programming and honest disclosure of content, warning against hidden ideological messaging in children's media. The organisation urges the establishment of new transparency standards to uphold parental rights, clarifying that its position was not about imposing an ideological agenda, but ensuring parental choice in their children's upbringing.

Rajasthan Samgrah Kalyan Sansthan highlights the importance of grassroots programmes in advancing early childhood development. It appeals to the UNHRC to continue prioritising work in this area, reinforcing the need for sustained efforts and investment at both national and international levels.



Edmund Rice International highlights the severe consequences of homelessness on children's development. They emphasized that the effects of homelessness - such as social stigma, sleep deprivation, and limited educational opportunities - profoundly impact early childhood development. Edmund Rice underscores the basic minimum support that children should expect from the state, calling for more robust safety nets and access to resources for children in need.

Human Rights Advocates focusses on the foundational importance of health, emotional security, and competencies in childhood development. It argues that violence against children is toxic to ECD and can hinder long-term growth. Special attention is given to the situation of migrant children and children in detention, who are at risk of neglect and abuse, resulting in significant mental distress. It calls for the abolition of immigration detention for children, the closure of private, profit-driven immigration detention facilities, and the incorporation of migrant children's interests into both international and national standards.

The **Ai Salam Foundation** raises concerns about Bahrain's violations of minors' rights in detention. It specifically references the case of Alia Abdullah, a 15-year-old girl who was detained, tortured, and sentenced to two years in prison for participating in peaceful protests. The Foundation condemns the coerced confessions extracted from minors during interrogations, which jeopardize their futures. Additionally, it reports on the medical neglect and denial of education faced by minors in detention, calling for urgent intervention to address these human rights violations.

The **Association of Iranian Short Statured Adults** expresses alarm over the scale of violations against children in Gaza, which they described as unprecedented. Despite the announcement of a ceasefire, immediate relief has been continually denied, leaving children to suffer from trauma and the loss of family members. It calls for a lasting ceasefire and immediate support for children's mental health and psychosocial needs (MHPSS), highlighting the need for urgent action to mitigate the ongoing effects of the conflict.

The **Beijing NGO Association for International Exchanges** shares the work being done to create multi-professional programs that address the diverse needs of children, including medical, legal, psychological, and personal support. It notes the successful implementation of over 800 events and a significant number of awareness campaigns each year, underscoring the importance of cross-sector collaboration to address children's rights comprehensively.

Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW) raises a critical concern regarding female genital mutilation and cutting (FGMC), reporting that globally, 230 million girls and women have undergone the procedure, with 80 million cases occurring in Asia alone. This practice constitutes a gross violation of the bodily integrity of girls, as children cannot consent to such procedures. ARROW calls for the prioritization of child rights by enacting national legislation to prohibit FGMC, providing country-level data, ensuring continued research, amplifying survivor voices, and developing culturally sensitive national action plans to end the practice. ARROW stresses that progress must be 27 times faster to meet the SDG target for reducing FGMC.

Rajasthan Samgrah Kalyan Sansthan emphasizes the critical role of early childhood development (ECD) during the COVID-19 pandemic. It urges for increased funding, a stronger engagement with civil society, and the adoption of more holistic policies to ensure children's



needs are met, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic. It calls for prioritizing ECD and ensuring sustained support to reach the most vulnerable populations.

The **Disabled Women's Association** condemns the French administration for the detention of children, citing the worsening conditions that severely affect their fundamental rights. The association draws attention to the deteriorating situation and urges for immediate reforms to ensure the protection of children in detention, especially those with disabilities, and to guarantee their right to a dignified life.

FACTS & FIGURES ON ID PARTICIPATION

52 State Delegations

- Including 2 high-level dignitaries

3 Inter-Governmental Organizations

1 National Human Rights Institution

19 Non-Governmental Organizations