

**80<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child**  
**Opening Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet**

14 January 2019

Distinguished Chair and Committee Members,  
Excellencies,  
Colleagues, Friends,

I am delighted to meet the members of this Committee, to wish you an energetic and determined new year, and to open this session. I particularly thank the four Committee members who will be leaving soon – Jorge Cardona, Bernard Gastaud, Hatem Kotrane and Kirsten Sandberg –for their great work and commitment.

I am also very glad to see among us many representatives of UN agencies and the Child Rights Connect network. This example of cooperation in action is exactly what we need, as we strive together to make our work more relevant and better connected, so that no child can be ignored or left behind.

This year will mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – by far the most widely ratified human rights treaty.

The Convention has driven significant progress in many countries. Virtually every State Party has passed laws to protect the rights of children, and has set up programs to promote and fulfill those rights – benefiting not only the individual children involved, but also all of society. Programs for education, nutrition and health-care have had tremendous positive impact on children across the world. Access to justice, to fundamental resources and opportunities have improved.

Last September, we witnessed the insights and commitment of many children during the Committee’s day of general discussion, which was dedicated to empowering and protecting children as human rights defenders. We were pleased that sixty children attended in various capacities, after consultations with almost 2,700 children around the world. In the UN, as well as at the national level, we are beginning to see more

opportunities like this, for children to raise their voices and help make mechanisms for children's rights more effective and protective.

And yet, such mechanisms do not always benefit all children without discrimination. Their primary consideration is not always the best interests of the child. Not all States Parties ensure, to the maximum extent, the survival and development of all children everywhere. In almost every context, children are still viewed as passive recipients of care, their voices dismissed or ignored.

Three years ago, the world's States promised a far better future for their children. But we are not yet on track to achieve essential aspects of the 2030 Agenda.

Yes, there has been progress in reducing poverty and enhancing child survival: since 2000, the global under-five mortality rate has been nearly halved – from 78 deaths per 1,000 in 2000 to 41 deaths per 1,000 in 2016. This means some 50 million children's lives have been saved. But based on current trends, more than 60

countries will miss the SDG neonatal mortality target. UNICEF estimates 60 million children under 5 will die between 2017 and 2030 from preventable causes and stunting, or chronic malnutrition, was estimated to affect 155 million children in 2016. Sadly, UNICEF reports only 13% of countries are on track to meet their target.

Children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and slavery, including the worst forms of forced labour, domestic slavery, sexual slavery and forced marriage. Testimonies collected by the staff of the Office, UNICEF and other bodies clearly indicate that child migrants and internally displaced children, in every region, are at heightened risk – and as you know, these populations are growing sharply.

ILO studies indicate that close to 25 million people are victims of forced labour, including more than 5.5 million children. The Special Rapporteur on the sale of children has reported that the share of children trafficked for the purpose of forced labour is increasing, and the share of children involved in forced labour is particularly

high. And according to the most recent available data from UNODC, as of 2012, one in three detected victims of trafficking was a child. Among these identified victims, there were almost double the number of girls than boys, with the trafficking of children for sexual exploitation greatly facilitated by digital technologies, which create new marketplaces and streamline the organisation of trafficking networks.

Millions of girls become mothers while they are still children, damaging their health and entrenching a cycle of poverty. Millions of children are traumatised and harmed by armed conflict. And it is impossible to accurately estimate just how many boys and girls are forcibly recruited by armed groups as fighters or, in effect, as slaves. In 2016 alone, UN monitors verified more than 20,000 such victims – but the full number is clearly far higher.

These numbers are a calamity. Each of them stands for a precious individual, whose hopes and dreams are being dashed. Tragically, there is still much to be done

before we realise the four core principles of the Convention –non discrimination; the child's best interests; right to life, survival and development; and right to be heard.

This year's 30th anniversary is an important opportunity to advocate greater emphasis on the Convention's principles and goals. I am glad to join UNICEF in calling for a high-level plenary event at the 74th session of the General Assembly in September, as well as an innovative 'virtual summit' in November, which would use digital technology to connect national events around the world.

The global review process of the 2030 Agenda is yet another powerful human rights platform that can have enormous benefit for children's dignity and rights. In addition, at the request of the Human Rights Council, the Office will also be providing child rights inputs to the Agenda's global review process at the annual High Level Political Forum in New York, which this year will focus on SDGs of particular interest: goals on education, inequality

and climate change, as well as specific targets on ending child labour and all forms of violence against children. We will be consulting widely, including with children, and with members of the Committee.

Distinguished Chair,

The Treaty Body review, which will take place by April 2020, is an opportunity to strengthen the coordination between Committees, which is already mandated by GA resolution 68/268. I understand that you have already appointed focal points to contribute to preparation of a common contribution to the review by all the treaty bodies, and that some time is set aside at this session for this discussion to take place. I look forward to recommendations that are pragmatic, and which enhance the protection of rights, and improve the accessibility, sustainability and impact of the treaty body system.

I also hope the annual discussion among Chairs will lead to progress on the disturbing topic of reprisals, as well as on the simplified reporting period, with greater

recognition by Committees of the need to put in place common entry points and common methodologies on both these issues.

The Committee has played a leading role on a wide range of frontier issues in child rights. I look forward to building on the Committee's discussions on ensuring a healthy environment, as the Office seeks to assist our partners to work towards mitigating and resolving human rights violations and abuses generated by environmental degradation.

I also welcome the Committee's development of a General Comment on the rights of the child in relation to digital media, which grapples with normative and practical challenges, as well as the important advantages and significant threats that digital media can bring. We stand ready to support the Committee's work on these thematic priorities.

Distinguished Committee Members,

You may recall the forceful statement by the 15 year old climate activist Greta Thunberg at the COP24 summit, demanding much more thoughtful planning and action for humanity's future. She, and many child human rights defenders like her, have emerged as clear and thoughtful voices, calling for principled action to promote human rights in the context of multilateral processes for a safer environment, safer migration, and more sustainable growth.

Last month, during a special discussion with children in the context of our celebrations for the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 16 year-old Nayeli Quiroz, from Ecuador, demanded that children and adolescents be empowered to participate in decisions that directly affect them. I asked 16 year-old Konstantinos what his dream was, and he told me, we need to "teach children from a young age that you are equal to everyone. If we change education, we (will) change humanity."

We need the power, the clarity, the foresight and the good sense of these children and adolescents to help us overturn many current trends. We need their leadership. As Kurt from Argentina told us during last September's discussion on child human rights defenders, "If the world were to see the problems with the eyes of the child, half of them would be solved and the other half would not exist at all".

Today's children and young people face enormous challenges linked to conflicts, the impact of climate change, economic instability, displacement, the shrinking space for civic involvement, globalization and changing labour markets.

These are also the same young people that are a source of ideas, innovations and solutions. Empowering them, respecting their dignity and upholding their rights benefits everyone.

My thanks go out to every member of this Committee, and to the staff who support it, for your work in upholding and promoting these vital human rights.

Thank you