

Statement by UN Child Rights Experts for Universal Children's Day

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Statement by UN Child Rights Experts for Universal Children's Day – marking the 27th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Geneva/ New York – On November 20, as the Convention on the Rights of the Child commemorates its 27th anniversary, UN child rights experts* urge Governments in all regions to spare no efforts to ensure universal implementation of the most widely ratified human rights instrument. Since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, much progress has been made in the protection of children's rights. This progress has been achieved in part because the Convention has become a truly global instrument guiding the enactment of legislation, the design and enforcement of public policies and the setup of institutions to secure the protection of children's rights. Moreover, the Convention has been reinforced by the adoption of three Optional Protocols, namely on the involvement of children in armed conflict, on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and on a communications procedure.

"Despite this significant progress, important challenges compromise the universal realization of children's rights," the experts highlighted. "It is high time to move from universal ratification to universal implementation and to give priority attention to children who have been left behind – especially those in vulnerable situations such as girls, children with disabilities, children living in poverty, children belonging to minorities and indigenous groups, and child victims of violence, conflict and crime," they added.

The principles and provisions of the Convention are as relevant as ever. They constitute a crucial reference for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda and for the safeguarding of children's rights in the face of humanitarian and financial crises and other pressing concerns, including the risks associated with the use of information and communication technologies and the impact of climate change and environmental deterioration.

"As we commemorate the 27th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an unprecedented 65.3 million people around the world have been forced to abandon their homes. More than half of the refugee population are children, often pressed to flee their countries to escape unspeakable acts of violence, and embarking on a perilous journey of uncertainty and fear in the hope of finding a place of safety where life can be given a chance. These pressing protection concerns must be addressed with

a deep sense of urgency and as a shared responsibility,” the experts highlighted.

The year 2016 also marks the 20th anniversary of the UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children and the 10th anniversary of the UN Study on Violence against Children. These ground-breaking studies have shown how the Convention on the Rights of the Child can help shape an action-oriented policy agenda, ignite policy commitments, and support tangible implementation and monitoring efforts, while also mobilizing global advocacy and support to prevent and address serious violations of children’s rights.

Building upon this important process, the United Nations is now embarking on the development of a third landmark initiative: an in-depth Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty, called for by the General Assembly. Children deprived of liberty are amongst the most vulnerable, invisible and forgotten in societies around the globe. Held in closed institutions, psychiatric centres or adult prisons, often awaiting trial for long periods of time and enduring inhumane conditions, these children often lack genuine opportunities to access justice and challenge the legality of their detention, and to benefit from education and vocational training, necessary health services and long-lasting social reintegration.

“As the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda moves forward, these children have been left behind. The global study provides a unique opportunity to promote the safeguarding of their rights and create opportunities for their fullest development. We welcome the designation of Manfred Nowak as the independent expert who will lead the Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty, and express our strong commitment to collaborate closely in the steps ahead. We call on Member States and all stakeholders to support this crucial process!”

Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Over the years, the optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child have been widely ratified and become a decisive reference to safeguard the protection of children’s rights.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict is now in force in 166 countries, having been most recently ratified by Pakistan. States parties have committed to ban the compulsory recruitment of children under 18 in armed forces and to ensure that those under the age of 18 do not take part in hostilities.

The Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography provides detailed guidance to States for the prevention, prohibition and criminalization of the sale and all forms of sexual exploitation of children, as well as to fight impunity for those offences within and across

borders, ensuring accountability of perpetrators and redress for child victims. The Protocol is in force in 173 States and nearing universal ratification.

The Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure foresees a system of individual and State's complaints before the Committee on the Rights of the Child to address the violations of children's rights, as well as a mechanism of inquiry that the Committee can initiate to investigate grave and systematic violations of the rights of child. This protocol has been ratified by 29 states and signed by 50.

"On Universal Children's Day, we call upon all states which have not yet done so, to take steps towards the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of its three optional protocols," the experts urged.

(*)Benyam Dawit MEZMUR, Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Maud de Boer-Buquicchio UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

For more information on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, see:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/CRCIndex.aspx>

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