

Joint Statement on behalf of 59¹ Member States of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs at the Ministerial Segment of the High-level Political Forum

16th July, 2019

Mr/Ms Chair,

We would like to commend ECOSOC President Inga Rhonda King for creating a space for the meaningful participation of children and young people in this year's HLPF. We hope this is the beginning of a new era in the United Nations that marks the consistent, deliberate and meaningful participation of children and young people in our discussions. In fact, their participation embodies the spirit of the theme for this year's HLPF, which is "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality."

Excellencies, 2019 is a particularly important year of stocktaking on the SDGs. In addition to our annual HLPF under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, the HLPF will convene in September at the opening of the General Assembly to take stock of progress and assess whether we are on track to fulfill the promises of the SDGs that we committed to four years ago.

Despite some progress, we are not on track to meet the SDGs by 2030. We need to increase our investments in people, everywhere in the world, starting with when they are children. This is essential to the achievement of the SDGs.

¹ Andorra, Armenia, Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Croatia, Dominican Republic (observer), Denmark, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Lesotho, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Panama, Pakistan, Peru, Qatar, Romania, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uganda, United Kingdom, Uruguay.

There are countless examples of how such investments pay dividends, not only on the individual level, but also on a societal level:

- Vaccinating children not only saves approximately 2-3 million lives per year, but every dollar spent on childhood immunizations yields US\$44 in economic benefits;
- Supporting family-friendly policies like paid parental leave benefits not only parents and their children, but also contributes to companies being more productive and profitable;
- Protecting children from violence is not only a moral imperative and their right -- but is the very foundation for peaceful communities and countries.

Importantly, these investments must include all children, especially those often left behind such as children living in poverty, children belonging to ethnic and racial minority groups, children with disabilities, children without parental care and migrant, refugee and internally displaced children.

As Members of the Group of Friends of Children, we believe that investing in children and their families is essential – from a moral perspective, from an economic perspective and from a practical perspective. Children are not only beneficiaries but are agents of change.

In addition to 2019 being an important year for the SDGs, this is also an important year for child rights – as we commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

This represents an opportunity for us to recommit to the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to operationalize those principles through our implementation of the SDGs.

Childhood has changed dramatically in the last 30 years since the CRC was adopted. Climate change; rapid urbanization; unsustainable exploitation of natural resources; protracted conflict and humanitarian crises, forced displacement; digitalisation and mass connectivity; and multi-dimensional and inter-generational poverty have all had a profound impact on children's rights and well-being. However, these past 30 years have also brought new opportunities, including through the advancement of science, technology and innovation, which can assist our collective and concerted action with -- and for --the 21st century child.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the SDGs will not be achieved without respect for and fulfillment of human rights -- including the rights of every child. As we continue to discuss our solutions and plans for accelerating progress on the SDGs, we must put child rights at the center of this work – both for the benefit of present and future generations of children, and for the future of our planet.

Finally, as co-chairs of the Group of Friends of Children, Jamaica, Luxembourg and Bulgaria invite your country to join the voluntary global pledge – “For every child, every right”, launched in July and available at: www.unicef.org. You would have by now received our letter, detailing the process for alignment with the global pledge. The global pledge provides an opportunity for all of us to demonstrate our commitment to child rights and to pursue the SDGs in line with the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Thank you.