**FINAL VERSION**

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**On behalf of Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director**

**Human Rights Council Panel**

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Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to address the council today.

Children’s rights are human rights. Central not only to children’s futures…but to the future of their communities and countries…and to humanity itself.

Last year, UNICEF — and the children of the world — marked a special milestone for these rights: the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The most widely ratified human rights treaty in history.

And over the last three decades, the global community has made rights real for millions of children around the world.

Today, more children are surviving past their fifth birthdays than at any time in history. More are being vaccinated than ever before. The number of children attending school is at an all-time high. More girls are in school than ever before — and the number of child marriages continues to drop.

But we must do more. Children’s rights continue to be limited by a range of barriers — some familiar, some that were unimaginable 30 years ago. Climate change. Migration. Natural disasters. Outbreaks like Ebola and COVID-19.

And conflicts that deny children their rights — and their futures.

From Syria, where the latest escalation in the northwest has driven half a million children from their homes, under extreme weather conditions.

To Yemen, which remains the worst humanitarian situation in the world today.

To South Sudan, where more than half of the population needs urgent assistance.

In every emergency, children’s rights are the first to be denied.

As a global community, we must act to ensure that every child — no matter the barriers they face, irrespective of their origin, background or circumstance — can access the health, nutrition, water and protection they need.

These rights, including the right to education, are inalienable, and must be respected and upheld at all times. Even during conflict, armed violence and civil strife, we cannot afford to risk the optimal development of an entire generation of children.

Especially when we, as a world, are facing a learning crisis in which millions of children are either contending with poor quality education, or are not in school at all.

Today, I want to focus on **two other areas** of need, in which we can improve the everyday lives of children — from birth to adulthood. By respecting and fulfilling their rights.

The **first** is **nutrition**.

Last year, UNICEF released our *State of the World’s Children* report, focused on this very issue. It found that:

* One in three children under five is not growing well — either stunted, wasted or overweight.
* At least one in two children suffer from “hidden hunger” or micronutrient deficiencies.
* And two in three young children are not fed the minimum diverse diet they need to grow healthy — especially among the poorest in every society.

And so, we call on governments to invest in large-scale nutrition programmes and food systems to improve the quality and availability of good nutrition, and to take action to end marketing practices for food, beverages and alcohol that target children.

We call on donors and partnersto gather around children’s nutrition in humanitarian emergencies, like conflicts, where the needs are so great.

The **second** area I’d like to discuss is **climate change**.

Climate change is the area children and young people have identified as one of their biggest concerns and more than 4 million young people have taken to the streets to demand their right to a healthy environment and safe future.

At current rates, global warming will exceed four degrees Celsius by 2100 according to the UN. This would have devastating health impacts for children.

Disrupted water and food systems…increased diseases like malaria and dengue…flooding of crowded coastal areas…and harm to children’s brain development.

We call on the countries of the world to treat climate change like the emergency that it is, and place children’s rights at the centre of their national action plans.

It includes countries reducing emissions and pollution today. We must redouble our efforts to reduce air pollution — and scale-up research and treatment of pollution-related illnesses for children and mothers alike.

Thirty years ago, the Convention on the Rights of the Child established that children have the right to health, which is why UNICEF supports the Council’s call to recognize a healthy environment as a human right, and we urge others to do the same.

Throughout, as we work to transform children’s rights into reality across these areas and many more, let us remember that we cannot discuss human rights without children’s rights.

UNICEF looks forward to working with the Council, and with the governments of the world, to continue putting children’s rights at the heart of national plans, priorities and strategies. And to making their rights real.

Thank you.

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