Annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child
Theme: Rights of the child and the digital environment

**Afternoon panel: How legal and policy frameworks for upholding children’s rights in the digital environment can be strengthened**

**Joint NGO statement**

**10 March 2023**

Dear panellists,

This statement is made on behalf of a group of NGOs.

**The digital environment plays an increasingly significant role across most aspects of children’s lives**. One in three internet users is a child, and, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, children’s development, their relationships, education and play, are increasingly mediated by digital technologies.

**The digital environment is predominantly privately designed, owned, and operated, and currently largely unregulated.** Regulating and enforcing businesses’ responsibility to respect children’s rights, prevent and remedy abuse of their rights, including through providing children with a high level of privacy, safety and security by design and default, and upholding consistent global standards, is urgent for ensuring children’s rights in the digital environment.

**Meaningful and equal access to safe digital technologies can support children to realize the full range of their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.** Children particularly value the access to information and exchange, and to expression and having their voice heard. Yet millions of children have no access to the digital environment at all. There is a growing cost for children from the digital divide, including the gender-related digital divide.

**Children are not a homogenous group; their agency, age and maturity, and different needs must be taken into account**. Also, some children are disproportionately affected by the risks of the digital world given the intersecting situations of vulnerability that they may face. It is important to acknowledge that gender, age, disability, and other inter-sectional factors impact on children’s different experiences online which must be carefully considered.

**The digital environment must be safe for children and respect their full range of rights**. At present, children’s presence goes largely unrecognised and uncatered for on most of the digital platforms where children spend most of their time. Children are consequently exposed to a wide range of significant risks in the digital environment, relating to content, contact, conduct and contract.

We call on States to:

1. Develop and implement comprehensive policies and action plans for children’s rights in the digital environment in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and UN Committee on the Right of the Child General comment No. 25, and
2. Legislate to ensure business responsibility to respect children´s rights, prevent and remedy abuse of their rights in relation to the digital environment.

List of signatories:

1. Child Rights Connect (ECOSOC Status)
2. Child Rights International Network (CRIN)
3. 5Rights Foundation
4. Instituto Alana (ECOSOC Status)
5. World Vision International (ECOSOC Status)
6. Make Mothers Matter (ECOSOC Status)
7. Plan International (ECOSOC Status)
8. Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia (ECOSOC Status)
9. Save the Children International (ECOSOC Status)