**2023 Annual Day of the Rights of the Child – 52nd Human Rights Council (10.03.2023)**

**Event date:** 10 March 2023, from 10:00 – 12:00 CET (morning panel) and from 14:00 – 17:00 (afternoon panel)

**Recordings**: [Morning panel](https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1a/k1avy1bsdg)[/ Afternoon panel](https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1n/k1nyojqe1n)

**Objectives**: Discussing How Legal and Policy Frameworks Can Be Strengthened to Uphold Children’s Rights in the Digital Environment

**Morning panel**

**Mr. Philip Jaffé***, Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and Director of the Centre for Children’s Rights Studies at the University of Geneva*

* Thanked the High Commissioner for his willingness to engage with children directly and his commitment to child participation throughout the UN system.
* It was urgent that the Committee on the Rights of the Child provide guidance to uphold child rights in the digital environment, hence our [General Comment 25](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3906061).

**Mr. Volker Turk,** *United Nations**High Commissioner for Human Rights*

* Expressed excitement for this panel as it is the first time that a discussion, where the majority of panelists are children, takes place. A lot more needs to follow.
* Wants to benefit from the children’s experience especially online and have them teach us how to do better.
* The internet allows instantaneous conversations with everyone, and children have seen firsthand the promise of technology but this **rapid development does not come without risk**. We need to establish a place where the panelists and future generations are safe online and can thrive. We should not only focus on the risk, but there is also an opportunity. **The digital space has years ahead to grow and evolve.**
* Either at home or at school, **children are the most connected age group** around the world, but it also depends where one is born due to the **digital divide**. We have a staggering **2.2 billion children and young people under 25 have no access to the internet at home**. This leads them being left behind and in some cases to not have access to education or to news.
* There is a gap between boys and girls, often times, **girls are more disadvantaged** when it comes to having access to quality internet.
* **Access to the internet should be a human right and not a privilege**.
* Online bullying and toxic influencers may share dangerous, misogynistic and racist views. Data can be used for illicit purposes. Children also can experience a lot of **social pressure on the internet in frightening way**.
* **Governments have established restrictive laws and censorships that impact children’s rights** to information, their freedom of expression, their privacy and their right to education.
* Calls on governments take more decisive measures and to firmly **put the wellbeing of children and their rights at the centre of these policies**. Governments must also **hold businesses accountable**; many algorithms take advantage of children with a goal to expand profit. Adequate safeguards are necessary.
* Children are the future but you are also our here and now and you cannot be reduced to a user base and your rights must be protected including your right to be heard. **We need children’s participation**, their energy and drive to change the world for the better, both online as offline. Children should be able to safely take advantage of all the opportunities that the digital world can offer.

**Mariana 12, Colombia**

* Buenos días, un cordial saludo a todas las personas presentes, yo soy Mariana y estoy muy feliz de estar aquí. Yo soy una niña afrodescendiente y vivo en medio de las montañas, en un territorio rural, ubicado en el sur de Colombia, donde la gente es muy amable, somos una comunidad unida y las familias tenemos muchos deseos de salir adelante. Sin embargo, hay situaciones que nos afectan mucho porque hay personas y grupos armados que nos hacen sentir miedo.
* En mi pueblo hay muchas niñas y niños que estamos estudiando; sin embargo, no contamos con acceso a la tecnología que nos permita conocer y aprender otras formas de comunicarnos con el mundo; un ejemplo de esto, fue lo que vivimos en la pandemia por COVID 19, cuando niñas y niños tuvimos que enfrentarnos a la falta de acceso a internet y a la tecnología. no nos habíamos preparado para ese momento. En mi comunidad, es muy difícil para nuestros papás comprarnos un teléfono o una Tablet, menos un computador, porque los recursos de las familias son muy escasos. Durante la pandemia yo no tenía clases virtuales, las profesoras y profesores nos mandaban los talleres en hojas, hacíamos las tareas y las enviábamos, pero no me gustaba así, era muy difícil estudiar y aprender de esa manera.
* En mi país Colombia, hay mucha desigualdad digital; según el DANE1 que es una entidad que saca las estadísticas en mi país, en las grandes ciudades 70 de cada 100 familias tiene acceso a internet, mientras que en los territorios rurales como en el que yo vivo solo 29 de cada 100 familias tiene internet.
* Además, los puntos de acceso a internet público están es en las ciudades grandes o en las cabeceras de los municipios, pero donde yo vivo, ni siquiera hay una biblioteca pública, solo hay una en todo mi municipio y queda en la cabecera municipal, donde muchas veces no podemos ir porque las vías no son buenas y también porque hay presencia de grupos extraños que controlan las carreteras. Para solucionar esto, con un grupo de amigas y amigos tenemos una iniciativa para crear una biblioteca móvil que pueda recorrer toda nuestra comunidad.
* Por otra parte, con el proyecto del que yo hago parte, hemos venido identificando que además de tener acceso a internet, es importante que aprendamos a hacer un buen uso de las tecnologías y que podamos identificar cuándo puede ser peligroso para nosotras.
* Yo pienso que los derechos de las niñas y los niños en el entorno digital requieren mayor atención de quienes toman decisiones en mi territorio y en mi país. Mi mensaje hoy para los Estados es que le den prioridad a las instituciones educativas de las zonas más apartadas, para que puedan contar con Internet y tecnología como Tablets o computadores para cada niña y cada niño; no como sucede actualmente en mi colegio, donde debemos sentarnos frente a un computador en grupos de cuatro estudiantes, eso hace que sea más difícil aprender a usarlos.
* Yo pienso que los gobiernos se deberían fijar más en esta situación, que sobre todo afecta a las zonas rurales, pues en las escuelas rurales el internet ni existe. Además, se necesita que capaciten más a las niñas y a los niños sobre las tecnologías y la importancia de saber utilizarla adecuadamente porque, en muchas ocasiones, las niñas y los niños están expuestos a la pornografía, al bullying y al acoso sexual, a veces entre compañeras y compañeros, otras por personas desconocidas que hacen presencia permanente en las regiones más apartadas y que son un riesgo para nosotras las niñas y los niños.
* También pienso que es necesario que creen políticas que sea útiles para todas las niñas y los niños, que sean inclusivas y que, además, reconozcan nuestra diversidad. Necesitamos un compromiso total de los Estados con la convención de los derechos de la niñez.
* Yo me pregunto: si la tecnología y el Internet hacen parte del uso cotidiano de las personas en todo el mundo, ¿Por qué en territorios como del que yo vengo este derecho aún no es posible para todas las niñas y todos los niños?
* Yo hoy les estoy hablando en nombre de todas las niñas y los niños de mi país, especialmente de quienes vivimos en las zonas rurales, yo en el futuro me sueño defendiendo los derechos de todas las personas, por eso quiero ser abogada, especialmente para defender los derechos de las niñas, los niños y las mujeres.
* Antes de terminar, quisiera hacerle dos preguntas al Alto Comisionado: ¿usted qué piensa sobre la falta de acceso a internet y tecnologías que afecta a las niñas y los niños de las zonas rurales y comunidades más apartadas, como de la que yo vengo?, y por lado, ¿Que recomendaciones daría a las niñas y a los niños sobre el buen uso de la tecnología?

**Kidus, 17 Ethiopia**

* My name is Kidus. I am from Ethiopia and in grade 12. I serve on the National Child Parliament as the Speaker of the House. I’d to express my deepest gratitude to those who organized this event so that we children can amplify our voices. Let us not forget that **children around the world suffer from various forms of violence, abuse and exploitation because they are deprived of participation on issues that matter to them.**
* Talking on issues related to digital technology is very crucial for us children. as we are standing in front of both immense opportunities as well as mounting challenges coming from the digital technology. Digital technology is bringing unlimited opportunities for children to educate and express ourselves, socialize with others and define ourselves in terms of who we are in the future. As also mentioned by Mariana, **access to technology is specifically important for children from developing countries like ours**.
* A couple of months ago, I had the privilege of speaking at the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in Maseru, Lesotho. During discussions with children coming from Rwanda, Eswatini, Lesotho, and DRC, we realized that in Africa, not only is the digital access limited, but that safety issues are mounting because of lack of preventive mechanisms. It is also my delight today to speak at the 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council focusing on the preventive aspect of the digital environment.
* As much as the digital technology is providing great opportunities for children, it also poses serious **challenges affecting their wellbeing and rights**. I am aware that children are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, prostitution, bullying, trafficking, labor exploitation, ethnic/race-based violence including, Insults, naming and shaming, discrimination, intimidation, hate speech, cyberaggression, etc. Bad contents like pornography, exploitative information, attacking others based on false narrative, misinformation and disinformation, and information encouraging children to engage in unlawful or harmful activities like joining armed groups are causing harms to children.
* Equally important to working towards creating digital access, we need to apply every wisdom so that children are protected from all forms of harm floating on the digital environment. Well-designed preventive mechanisms put in place ensure the wellbeing of children on line.
* Let me kindly but strongly remind you that prevention is always better than cure. Prevention is also cheaper and safer as opposed to investing in looking for remedy. **Before children are victim harmed and suffer physically, mentally, socially and psychologically, let us put in place preventive mechanisms** so that they remain safe. Let us put prevention at the top of our priorities. Let the resources, knowledge, power and skills we have be mobilized towards ensuring safety on the digital environment. Safe digital environment is a required for raising safe children. That way, we can ensure the future generation to be holistically well, more productive, and peaceful.
* In conclusion, as also mentioned by the high commissioner, on behalf of children around the world, I **implore all of you to take all legislative and administrative measures to protect children** from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation on the digital environment.
* So, my question to you High Commissioner is: What are you doing to ensure that the UN is working to ensure children’s online safety? How can we all use digital media effectively to address digital issues affecting children such as abuse, exploitation, and violence?
* Thank you for your kind attention.

**Nidhi, 14 India**

* Last December, I was fortunate enough to have gotten invited to take part in a panel discussion and speak at the Annual Internet Governance Forum on children’s online safety, particularly on Educational Technology apps and Children’s Data Privacy while using them. In preparation leading up to that event, I did my own research and listened to other panelists who shared their views. It was alarming to learn about the risks that we children are subject to, and how unsafe we are whilst using the internet.
* As much as Data protection is a topic concerning adults, it is just as important, if not more, for children, especially now as we do anything and everything online.  **1 in every 3 online users worldwide is a child**. Most of the time, they don't even know how to use online tools safely or preserve their personal information, which makes them extremely vulnerable. It is estimated that **72 million pieces of personal data will be collected on every child around the world before their 13th birthday**. This is just alarming.
* It is evident that Digital companies through apps, online tools, social media, websites etc. are constantly tracking and storing our data. Personal data like names, Birthdays, locations, time of usage, our likes and dislikes are all getting monitored and saved somewhere forever. Indeed, some of it might be used to enhance our digital experience, but increasingly we see that the information they collect and the purposes for which they get used, go much beyond simple promotion and content suggestions. This practice of collecting more data than what is required, I strongly believe, is unethical and a **violation of children’s online space**. Especially when we may not have intentionally signed up for this and probably don’t even understand the long-term consequences of giving away our personal information.
* So, how do we know what our online data is being used for? Is it being sold to other third-party companies? How do we know the information we provide online is safe?
* The most frustrating aspect of this issue is that most of the time it seems nothing can be done about it. For example, **Terms and Conditions easily make it legal for companies to do whatever they please with a user’s data**. T&Cs are to help users understand how their data is being used before they opt in, however increasingly, it is almost as if they are purposefully made to be unreadable, with complex and legal terms that dissuade users from reading fully. Many times, even if we read them, we don't understand what they mean. It is found that **only 1% of digital users read the terms and conditions** before they start using any new application. Just think about it, if even adults can’t read through these, how is it that children are expected to?
* In addition, new technologies like AI used online are so advanced these days that even regulators are finding it hard to keep up with how data is collected from the users. As most big platforms are owned by the same digital companies, data collected is also used across platforms and now used for entirely different purposes. Companies use our data to recommend content that keeps us hooked on to the screens for much longer. When putting this in the context of children, this would mean they see things that they are not ready for and inadvertently lead them to explicit content.
* I distinctly remember when I was about 9 years old, how scared I was when I saw a scary image while exploring a game on the internet. The image SCARRED me and while talking to my friends about this, I realized that many of them had the same experience that made us so afraid for years. This is an example of how children can accidentally get exposed to content that is inappropriate.
* I find myself quite lucky to be in an environment where I get guidance and all the help needed to understand how to act safely in the online world; however, not all children have this privilege. Last year, I got this amazing opportunity to help the Somali Refugee community in Malaysia and volunteered at their community school. I realized that many children there, as much as they did not have access to the internet or devices, also had no knowledge whatsoever about online safety and how to be safe in the digital environment.
* So, Mr High commissioner, I have a question for you Sir. how can underprivileged children, with no experience of how the online world works, trust that companies online will protect them and their data? What policies are in place for this and if such data is taken from children, how do we know that these kinds of companies will be dealt with?
* Thank you for your time and attention.

**Mr. Volker Turk,** *United Nations**High Commissioner for Human Rights*

* Listening to your experience gives me incredible hope for what human rights will mean for the future. Sometimes we come from privileged backgrounds and we can forget about the rest of the world, this was a reality check. We heard from Mariana and her own experience, pointing out the **challenges one faces in rural areas**.
* Internet access is affected by the violence and discrimination present in the country. There are public spaces where children can have access to the internet and then it can be expanded to the home. These paces could be the schools or libraries, but it is an urgent need we should address.
* Encourages the reading of General Comment 25 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the use of technology in the perspective of safety and knowledge.
* To answer Kidus, we are analyzing the risks and work with countries and businesses to ensure that regulations exists. The African Union is taking measures to look into this, as is the EU, to ensure better online safety in particular for children but also for other age groups. How can we address digital issues that affect children? It is **important that there is digital literacy**. This has to include the perspective of child rights. **Good practice examples are collected and shared among others.**
* Nidhi, I lived in Malaisia and I dealt a lot with refugees there so I know what it means for the most vulnerable people to have access to the digital space. A lot of work is done to make it accessible to refugees. We need to reach out to the private sector and make sure that companies understand their responsibilities and to help through the issues of the digital divide especially for vulnerable groups.

**Country remarks**

**National council for motherhood and childhood of Egypt**

* The means of communication are spreading so Egypt has included a strategy to integrate civil society into the debate. Stressed the importance of the safety of children in the digital sphere. Egypt is determined to respect the declarations that it has ratified. Also combats bullying.

**Timor-Leste**

* The community of Portuguese speaking countries is pleased to hear children’s voices in the council. There are tools developed but there are many risks too, cooperation is needed, and children must be put at the heart in the development of policies. Our Member States are devoted that children’s voices and rights are respected in all UN agencies. What can we do to ensure the safe use?

**European Union**

* The digital environment plays a more significant role in the lives of children. Where connectivity is available, children are active users. It has unlimited advantages and dangers, there are unfair terms, dark patterns and information filtering. As meaningful access to the internet can support children in the protection of their rights, it can also put those rights at risk. The digital environment must be safe for children – a new strategy for protection of children is needed. What balance must be struck between the risks and the advantages children face online’

**Turkic States**

* The recognition and protection of children’s rights is crutial. Businesses should protect children’s rights. Cyber violence and stalking require decisive action. General Comment 25 is an important reminder that the rights of the child should be a primal obligation. Cooperation on this matter between Turkic states is being expanded.

**Cote d’Ivoire**

* Group of African States – welcome the holding of this annual day of discussion. The digital environment is taking an increasing vital role in children’s rights, especially during the pandemic when school was online. Child pornography and bullying are problematic, and States must uphold legal instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. All stakeholders must step up their efforts. We must provide the necessary conditions that allow children to not be exposed to risks.

**Lithuania via a child representative**

* Although we have a right to education, there are shortcoming, the quality is insufficient. The Covid pandemic showed that we should be safe on the internet where dangers are lurking. We also found out how important social interactions are to our mental health. We are proud to our right to freedom of speech. How long will we feel the effects of the Covid pandemic within the European Union?

**Luxembourg via a child representative**

* When I think of children in the digital environment, I think of them making friends all over the world, but they are also exposed to risks. Lack of age identification and very accessible harmful images are some of the causes. Children are suffering to share their experiences with their environment. Schools should introduce awareness campaigns and bullies must be held accountable for their actions.

**Ireland via a child representative**

* For all the good that the digital environment provides, it also provides a platform for those wishing to do harm. Many children receive some form of digital education, but it is often outdated. More children will be harmed by their online presence, and they need to be given the skills to navigate the space safely.

**UNICEF**

* As we have heard, digital technologies can affect children’s lives. It can play a role in ensuring children’s rights such as the right to education. Sexual exploitation, cyber aggressions and incitement to suicide are all risks. UNICEF calls on all businesses to embed children’s rights in their policy commitments. Holding businesses accountable for child rights abuses is necessary. We stand ready to support.

**Bulgaria**

* This is a chance to apply General Comment 25 and to ensure children’s rights in the digital space. 1 child out of 3 is using the internet and they are suffering. It is essential that they interact in a safe environment and that there is close cooperation between different actors. This is of prime importance to Bulgaria, online safety rules were set up and an agency wrote up a guide for children for them to be more informed on the dangers and challenges on the internet.

**Korea**

* Children’s rights should be fully protected. The digital environment can cause harm. More close cooperation is needed based on children’s rights.

**Slovenia via a child representative**

* Children should be better informed. The internet is a tool for empowerment and support but also increases the vulnerability of children. It is a tool to engage with peers, but it should not replace our face-to-face interactions. All children must receive education on the digital space, awareness raising for parents and care givers.

**NHRI and NGO remarks**

**Group of children Cybercorrespondents of the Children's Platform in Spain**

* Cyber correspondence is a program of the Children's Organizations Platform in Spain. We think that the time we spend on social networks is not always "quality". One of the reasons is the strategy they are using to promote that we consume content without control thanks to the "Algorithm" that generates dependency. Another is that, although on the internet we can reach very positive references that motivate us in our day to day, we also find people with speeches of hatred and rejection of the diversity that surrounds us. The digital environment is globalized so that liking becomes, on the networks, a desire to like everyone, to need approval and accept the opinion (good and bad) of people we don't even know or know us. The content that is shown to us, manipulated with filters and hidden advertising, is not real and leads us to the constant frustration of not being able to reach that false normality. They promote unhealthy lifestyle habits that encourage us to harm ourselves and attack ourselves. Even so, disconnecting is not at all easy: the relationships in our daily life are strongly linked to the relationships we establish on social networks and to stay away from them is to exclude ourselves.
* The digital environment allows us to express ourselves freely, express our opinions anonymously, exercise our right to leisure and develop personally; that's why we propose that it be legislated so that children's rights are not lost. That the companies understand that they can allow access to boys and girls by generating filters that allow their publications not to expose them and that, if at any time we decide to unsubscribe from them, all our data will be deleted absolutely and we will no longer be in any database of data It would be necessary for us to be educated to understand all this better, which is also new for us and us. At best, educational centers can be a good place to have workshops and real training in this sense. We also believe that the ban does not serve to protect us in this environment: although networks cannot be accessed until the age of 14, we think that the majority of boys and girls with 12 years of age have already registered with a fake profile so as not to feel weird not to be left behind. Perhaps it could be more effective if the adults around us could accompany us on this path and give voice so that we can express our doubts and needs.
* And to finish, we would like to thank the Human Rights Council for this opportunity to express our opinions and we would like them to take them into account.

**Conseil des Droits de l’homme du Maroc**

* We have carried out the processing of complaints of children. A digital space has been introduced for children to have access to independent reporting mechanisms. It is true that the digital environment has opened up opportunities for children but also exposes them to risky behavior. The field work has also shown the problem of inclusion for children who do not have access to digital technology.

**Save the children Indonesia via a child representative**

* The digital environment is a vital part of our lives. It also presents serious risks - our dependency is high, we are exposed to hate speech and inappropriate content. This is our call to promote digital literacy for children, parents and children. They should all know how to protect children and ensure that digital companies respect those rights as well as promote other interactions such as with the environment. How can children in the world collaborate to keep us safe online?

**Nidhi, 14 India**

* Listening to the speakers on the floor, I am glad that everyone is really concerned about the issues that we face in the online world. I would just like to add on to some of these thoughts.
* **Algorithms that are used by social media are indeed very invasive** and any online activity at a key stroke level is stored by these digital companies with the possibility of future use as they please. This is not right, especially when children are using these services without fully being aware of what information they are giving away. **Data is often collected** on us and our usage patterns for content suggestions that result in extended screen time which can have detrimental effect on our physical and mental health. This eventually leads to content that may not be appropriate for all age groups as they stare at their screens – thanks to the algorithms that are not always designed with us in mind. So, it is **crucial to keep children in mind while designing services** and whatever algorithm is used so that we are protected.
* Social media is powerful and does have its uses, by having **age restrictions, to help younger children** stay away from the possibility of seeing inappropriate content. However, in my own personal experience I have seen even some of my own friends getting onto social media platforms by falsifying their age and email IDs because they want to feel included. In my opinion, instead of putting an entry age restriction to subscribe to these platforms and exclude younger children, we should encourage to create child friendly versions that filters out what cannot be seen by those below a certain age. For example, 10-12 year olds can have a different version of social media that is appropriate for them so that they can also responsibly use and take advantage of these services.
* Another aspect that I think is key is - although social media is an open place for everyone and tries to be inclusive, it sometimes creates a false reality for us especially when it comes to beauty standards and body image. When we see the pictures that online influencers and advertisements show with filters and make up, we clearly get excited. I believe not all children can distinguish between what is actually real and what is deeply fake when these images and videos are projected on our personal devices. These promote false aspirations in children that could lead to physical and **mental health issues** as they try to imitate them.
* Finally I would say that it is also concerning that many a times even when we stop using these services and exit these platforms, not all our data gets removed and most of it stays in these systems. This, many times, interferes with the right to be forgotten that we have and as children don’t often know about this, it is also not spoken about, which is why it’s crucial to bring this to attention.

**Kidus, 17 Ethiopia**

* In addition to what the speakers have said, the importance of internet to children is not debatable. For children to be able to enjoy all the benefits of the digital space, children should get access to it. The digital space is the place where children maximize their education, express their views, join or establish good networks, use as a best place to understand what the future holds for them.
* Given the world is growing more digitized, children cannot imagine their future without interaction on the digital space. **The future generation of children is anticipated to be more digital.**
* All this leads to underscore the importance of working on expanding access to the internet. Internet has become part of the day to day activity of people. This is going to be truer to children.
* Contrary to this, there are countries that are depriving of access to the internet for a number of reasons. One is, especially for developing countries, **expansion of internet access is not happening due to lack of financial resources**. On the other hand, **repressive governments shut down internet services** when they consider that a free flow of information has a negative impact on their political establishment. In doing so, children are deprived of their right to the digital space, with the likely negative economic, academic and social impacts on their future live.
* For children to enjoy their right to the digital environment, nation states, policy makers, decision makers, and regional and international bodies need to take a serious stance on this. Children’s right to the internet shouldn’t be negotiable nor comprisable. Nation states need to be encouraged to expand access to the internet; and be held accountable when they failed to do so.
* Coming to keeping children safe, I also want to reiterate that **access without preventive mechanisms is not going to help children**. On the contrary, children will be more exposed to harmful contents. The spoiling factor is what we call it “Algorithm” as it has magnetic power to be attracted and spend more time on the internet. Once children get addicted to the digital environment, it is very difficult to become free. So, for children to remain safe on the digital space, I strongly recommend that there should be **age verification tool.**

**Mr. Philip Jaffé***, Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and Director of the Centre for Children’s Rights Studies at the University of Geneva*

* Called for more child participation. This is the first step to collaboration. The Human Rights Council has taken a big step forward.

**Mr. Volker Turk,** *United Nations**High Commissioner for Human Rights*

* We want to give a specific focus to consultations with young people and children, it will give more opportunities of interconnectivity on human rights issues. General Comment 25 provides the best example as it gives guidelines from the perspective of the child. To know the best interest of children, it is about participation and ensuring that we understand what is happening in the online and real world. We need to **keep sharing good practises**.

**Mariana, 12 Colombia**

* Recientemente con varios compañeros y compañeras de mi zona pudimos construir un video de mensajes claves de protección, el cual subimos en redes sociales para compartir con otras personas y otros niños y niñas. Esto lo pudimos hacer gracias a la tecnología y a las redes sociales, que hoy nos permiten poder comunicarnos con todo el mundo y compartir información que es de interés de muchas personas. También el internet nos ayuda a enseñarnos, a participar en muchos espacios, a aprender de muchas cosas de interés y además a promover los derechos de la niñez. Por supuesto hay muchos riesgos de los cuales hemos conversado en el panel, pero también hay muchísimas oportunidades. Juntas y juntos podemos hacer que el resto de las generaciones usen de manera correcta el internet y aprovechen todos los beneficios que hoy el mundo digital ofrece de una forma segura y apropiada.

**Remarks – second round**

**Poland**

* Has developed digital education platforms for students and they can express their views on drafts.

**Morocco**

* IT has taken over all spheres of live. Has developed a digital strategy for 2030.

**Uruguay via child representative**

* There is great access to social media from a young age. During the pandemic it allowed us to not miss out on our education, it allows us to spread our opinions and we find independence in using digital tools. There are also negative consequences to this usage. Grooming and sexting are such risks. We need to raise awareness among adults who are responsible for the safety of the internet. Nidhi, what role do you think you as a young podcaster can play in ensuring the safety of the internet?

**Chili**

* Fostering the fundamental rights of children but risks to the body and mind of children. Countries must make the wellbeing of children at the heart of their policies. Actions are taken to ensure that the information received online by children is age-appropriate.

**Afghanistan**

* Millions of children in Afghanistan are deprived of their education. Education is the future. 6 million children cannot go to school and a majority are girls. Requests a minute of silence in remembrance of the girls who cannot access their education.

**Organisation of Islamic cooperation**

* Many children are behind in having access to learning opportunities. There is a need to emphasize the technological divide. All required measures must be taken to ensure the integrity of children. Countries must investigate acts of violence against children. Proposed a comprehensive review of the rights of children in Islam.

**UNFPA**

* Misinformation about sexual education can expose children to the risk of sexually transmitted diseases and violence. Women are exposed to threats and sexual violence; especially disabled women and girls are targeted by this. To build a safer digital environment, we must have better sexual education.

**Paraguay**

* Careful analysis is necessary and the best interests of the child is of great importance in approaching the right to diffuse information as well as to give opinions and to have access to technological means. States bear the primary responsibility, but other stakeholders should also do their part. Need for an exchange between all these actors. The best interest of the child should be a primary factor when regulating the digital environment.

**France**

* There are many risks in using digital tools. Has strengthened the use of children images on the internet and sanctioned platforms that do not significantly protect children enough. Has launched a laboratory to analyse how to protect children online, does this Council not play a role in engaging with the private industry on how to ensure the protection of children online?

**Argentina**

* We must have a free cyber space and we must be able to enforce cooperation as well as digital literacy. We must protect children from the violence they can experience online. Through our laws and the national programme to raise awareness on grooming.
* States should be the guardian of the protection of human rights in the virtual space.

**Netherlands via a child representative**

* The digital environment gives us the opportunity to learn. It gives us the knowledge we need to shape our future lives. Digital opportunities come with a risk. How can we be protected from grown ups trying to make us believe things for their own benefit? How can we be supported in shaping that future? Regardless of the colour of our skin or the country we are born in, how can our rights be protected on the digital space?

**Romania via a child representative**

* Technology brought us together, especially today. It is a major part of our lives, and we can't deny that. Children have access to technology younger and younger, being perpetually online their neural development and their future view of the world around us, is at risk. With so much advertising and marketing targeting children, I have not seen enough people talk about the ethics of it.
* While we enjoy its benefits, and we grow more and more dependent on the internet, we have to ask ourselves what are we doing to protect the future generation? How many more victims of harassment, media manipulation and other dangerous practices do we need for authorities to pay attention, for all States to act on this issue?
* Children are vulnerable human beings and it’s the States’ responsibility for them not to become prey. We need, now more than ever, to protect the youth of this generation better.
* I speak today not as a simple guest but as a child in this digital age. Please listen. States need to ensure that both – children and parents – have media literacy skills. Children's rights are to be respected across all digital platforms which children have access to.
* We need everyone to cooperate on this issue, we need to make sure the Councils’ recommendations are fully implemented, by all States, starting today. Countries like Romania have already incorporated some measures into public policies, but we also need action plans and progress reports.
* As children and citizens, we count on you to listen and take action. States need to be held accountable. Children need to be protected.

**Amnesty International via a child representative**

* We want a safe and trustworthy space where our rights are respected. There are so many children who do not have access to the internet but those who do have access suffer from online violence or the use of our personal data. Those who create the digital environment do not consider our wellbeing. Our participation is vital to ensure that the digital environment is created in a safe way.

**Mr. Philip Jaffé***, Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and Director of the Centre for Children’s Rights Studies at the University of Geneva*

* I wonder after hearing all these comments made by children, if the Human Rights Council would be open to changing its name one day a year as the Child Rights Council.

**Mariana, 12 Colombia**

Después de escuchar al Alto Comisionado, a mi compañera y compañero y al público; sin duda para mí la principal recomendación para todos los estados miembros es que trabajen por los temas de acceso y la disminución de las desigualdades que enfrentan muchas regiones y muchos territorios apartados.

Si logramos reducir las brechas en materia digital, logramos que los niños y las niñas accedan al derecho a informarse, a participar, a empoderarse, a aprender, a comunicarse, a estar en un ambiente seguro, pero lo más importante: A CRECER EN UN MUNDO CONECTADO DE FORMA SEGURA

**Kidus, 17 Ethiopia**

Coming to keeping children safe, I also want to reiterate what the speakers have said that access without preventive mechanisms is not going to help children. On the contrary, children will be more exposed to harmful contents. The spoiling factor is what we call it “Algorithm” as it has magnetic power to be attracted and spend more time on the internet. Once children get addicted to the digital environment, it is very difficult to become free. So, for children to remain safe on the digital space, I strongly recommend that there should be age verification tool.

**AFTERNOON SESSION 15:00 – 17:00**

**Mariana, 12 Colombia**

* My colleagues and I have discussed the barriers to the internet that especially exist in remote areas.
* Importance on promoting information on the use of digital tools and protecting boys and girls from the risks that it brings along.

**Nidhi, 14 India**

* First of all, i want to thank you for giving us children this amazing opportunity to come and share our views that we believe are so critical to us and will have a deep impact in how we use the internet safely and get access to online services.
* From our morning panel discussions there were quite a few suggestions and recommendations that could be used for implemention. I would like to highlight the key 10 points for you to consider during this afternoon session.
* Make terms and conditions child friendly and easily understandble.
* Prevention is better than cure- so lets make the internet safer by designing it better before even we start providing this to cildren to use.
* Promote training to children on how to protect them selves on the internet.
* Proivide more digital involvement in education particularly in areas where there is no access to internet.
* Goverments should focus more on rural areas and try and provide access to all irrespective. Focus on girls is a must.
* Bring awareness among children across every age group to teach them how to be safe online and how to distinguish what is good and bad on the internet. I personally try and do it in my way by using my podcast to reach as many kids as possible. But we have to bring awareness at a larger level.
* Recognise the diversity in children and how this can be addrssed while providing access online.
* Businesses are equally accountable and must ensure that data collected is used in a manner that does not reveal personal information.
* Algorithms should be used responsibly by companies.
* Both companies and goverements should consult children in designing the online services and formulating policies
* I would like to thank all the supporting organisatsions that made this possible and allowing us to be heard. I hope and encourage the afternoon panelists to consider these recommendation from us children ans ensure that we keep in mind the convention on the rights of the childa and the general comment 25 in your discussions.

**Mr. Philip Jaffé***, Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and Director of the Centre for Children’s Rights Studies at the University of Geneva*

* Implement the recommendations that are provided in General Comment 25. The High Commissioner referred to the Global Digital Compact and we cannot envision the future with another category of experts without the participation of children. The participation of **children shows us that they express valuable opinions and should be listened to**. We should consult more with children; they are looking at us within a virtual reality. We must cooperate so that the full range of children rights are protected, respected and fulfilled. Children have shared with us how unsafe their digital experience is. These abuses may also be perpetrated by their closed ones. Why bother to strengthen the online legal and policy frameworks when our offline frameworks cannot protect children in their daily livelihoods?

**Baroness Beeban Kirdon,** *Crossbench peer of the UK House of Lords*

* We heard from over 100 experts and over 1000 children from all over the world. 5rights has a mission to develop children’s rights in a way that they deserve. It has been gratifying to see a shift in the language. Formally it is now accepted that children’s rights also count online. **What is illegal offline should also be illegal online**. People under the age of 18 are children, the tech sector is therefore wrong in considering children of 13 years old as adults. States and businesses are responsible to take children’s rights into consideration in the design of their products. General comment 25 points out the many advantages of the digital world and the potential in the realization of children’s rights. Today children’s experience is tainted by abuse and suffer from mental health issues as a consequence. **Children are the collateral damage to a system that did not protect them**. General comment 25 acknowledges the benefits of the digital world but calls for adherence to a digital framework. This is a big issue but not an insolvable one.

**Mr. Konstantinos Karachalios***, Managing director of the Institute of electrical and electronics standards association.*

* The bitter truth is that technology is rarely neutral. **Children’s privacy is violated** by the many social media platforms. Emotional intimacy becomes a rarity. **We cannot keep shaping our future for private interests**. The online world can be built on principles. We delivered our expertise to 5 rights and what we are proposing is the proactive approach. We inaugurated a programme in which we make tools free and accessible to the public. Fake news and violence do not belong in the childhood years.

**Ms. Julie Inman Grant,** *Safety Commissioner of Australia*

* The global online safety movement is expanding. The internet was not developed with children in mind while 1 in 3 online users is a child. Why do adults rights keep being prioritized over children’s rights?

**Country remarks**

**Baltik countries**

* Children are the biggest users of the digital space. We are concerned that the **violations that disproportionally target children are on the rise.** In order to achieve this, we must update and spread best practices. It is necessary to include relevant stake holders.

**Croatia, Slovenia, Austria**

* The digital environment changes consequently and so must the regulatory framework. It is essential to inform children on online safety. How can states better use the human rights tools to protect children from the risks that AI can pose?

**European Union**

* Called for the need to apply a **child rights approach**. Countries have a responsibility to provide meaningful access to the internet. The EU is carrying out extensive consultations with children, International Organisations, NGOs and academia. We must be mindful of the challenges that remain in ensuring safety of children active on the internet.

**Benelux**

* **The Human Rights Council should give children the opportunity to engage when possible**.

**Switzerland**

* It is **only by listening to children’s voices that we can correctly build frameworks**. Switzerland is alarmed by the sexual exploitation of children online.

**Remarks by NIHRs and NGOs**

**Child Rights Connect 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:  **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 **Legislate to ensure business responsibility to respect children´s rights, prevent and remedy abuse of their rights in relation to the digital environment.**

**Plan International**

* The digital world creates a risk to children and especially to girls. **Children have the same right to protection in the virtual world as in the real one.**
* Governments and private companies are accountable in protecting children’s rights. They must provide regulations in that regard.

**Mr. Philip Jaffé***, Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and Director of the Centre for Children’s Rights Studies at the University of Geneva*

* To prevent children’s rights from being violated, we must **enhance their access to justice**. Children fear reprisals and social exclusion. The **complaints mechanisms must be free, child friendly and accessible**. In many countries children have committed suicide due to bullying on the internet. **Compensation may involve commercial actors apologizing beyond fines and asked the withdraw some of their services.**

**Baroness Beeban Kirdon,** *Crossbench peer of the UK House of Lords*

* For the last 5 years we have given workshops to children on how the digital world functions.
* Privacy is the road to safety.

**Mr. Konstantinos Karachalios***, Managing director of the Institute of electrical and electronics standards association.*

* There is a global pandemic of internet addiction. Companies violate the law and prioritize wealth over the health of children. We can solve this problem easily, just stop collecting children’s data, we can solve this within the next two years.

**Bolivia**

* Bolivian people are undergoing a process of change to reduce the poverty levels and reduce the number of school dropouts. The right to education should respond to the needs of everyone. We are attempting to bridge gaps between citizens and the State as well as to promote free knowledge and training teachers in technological and digital sources.

**Spain**

* Has approved the **comprehensive protection law for children in the light of violence**. We put children at the heart and include their opinions in all provinces and state mechanisms.

**Sierra Leon**

* Faces challenges such as access to digital devises to fully participate in the digital world
* **9 in 10 countries used online education platforms in 2020 to support children’s education.** Our Ministry for basic and secondary education and UNICEF jointly designed “learning passport”, that represents a flexible learning platform for children.

**Vietnam**

* Challenges and risks to children’s development due to the development of the virtual space but also opportunities.
* Develops public awareness campaigns. How can the digital industry better play its part in keeping children safe online?

**Namibia**

* Development and the implementation of child protection online policies are lagging.
* **Only 29% of countries have an action plan** in place in that regard.

**Botswana**

* Encourages States to promote a human rights-based approach and supports the participation of stakeholders including children themselves.

**Benin**

* Joins the statement made by Cote d’Ivoire. Has been combatting online terrorism acts.
* Will an additional protocol on this issue be developed?

**United States of America**

* Calls out malnutrition and the many other threats children face on a global scale.

**Georgia**

* Has made the international telecommunication guidelines for parents and educators on child online protection available in Georgian.

**Costa Rica**

* Children can be victims of harassment and exploitation online.
* Children’s rights must be protected in and outside the digital world.
* The virtual world must be accessible to all, including indigenous communities.

**Malawi**

* Passed a cyber security act to regulate the cyber space.
* More needs to be done in terms of policy and awareness raising.

**Venezuela**

* Closer and more decisive cooperation is needed by all stakeholders and children’s right to be heard must be respected.
* Comprehensive protection of girls is a priority.

**Remarks by NHRIs and NGOs**

**International organization for the right to education**

* We need to take advantage of parents and use them as allies in protecting children in the digital world

**Beijing NGO for international exchange**

* International organisations, States should do research in child-friendly digital tools.

**Concluding remarks panel**

**Mr. Philip Jaffé***, Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and Director of the Centre for Children’s Rights Studies at the University of Geneva*

* In response to the representative from Benin in regard to an Additional Protocol on this matter, this will be added to the long list of discussion points.
* Thanked the Council to dedicate an entire day to children’s rights but also to have the children present on the panel.

**Baroness Beeban Kirdon,** *Crossbench peer of the UK House of Lords*

* Acknowledge that not all harms to children do not happen on the internet.
* Thanked the Biden administration who called for comprehensive privacy for children and the social experiment that children are currently undergoing.
* There are very different outcomes for girls than for boys online and there are insecurities inflicted on them.

**Mr. Konstantinos Karachalios***, Managing director of the Institute of electrical and electronics standards association.*

* We connect you but we also create the algorithmic technologies that underpin our lives today.
* We need to assume our responsibility, we the technical communities must assume our responsibility. We cannot close our eyes. For reducing massively the addiction pandemic, we must stop collecting the date of children by law. This can be done within two years from now.