



Child Rights Connect statement
Opening of the 93rd session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
8 May 2023

Distinguished members of the Committee, representatives of UN agencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I take this opportunity to welcome the newly elected and re-elected members of the Committee. The Child Rights Connect Network and Secretariat is privileged to enjoy an open and constructive working relationship with the Committee and we look forward to continuing this with you all in the days and years to come. I also wish to thank the outgoing Chair, Mikiko Otani, for her leadership of the Committee and for her support to progress child rights standards and practices across the UN system.

As most of you know, Child Rights Connect this year celebrates 40 years of child rights advocacy in Geneva. This coincides with 25 years since adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and 75 years since the Universal Declaration on Human Rights was adopted. Yet, at a time when we should be celebrating, we take this opportunity to reflect on the challenges faced by the child rights movement, including child human rights defenders.

Across the globe, we see attacks on democracy, shrinking civil society space and an unprecedented backlash against universal human rights, undermining the freedom, safety and action of those defending human rights. Child rights and their defenders, including children, and the larger child rights movement are not spared. For various reasons – including under the banner of advocacy for the ‘protection of the family’ and ‘traditional values’ – restrictions and attacks on child rights and child rights defenders come from non-State groups as well as States that lead conservative initiatives within UN human rights processes in Geneva. These restrictions and attacks target all those standing up for child rights, from the local to the international level, which in turn undermines the child rights movement as a whole.

Our conference on Friday 26 May – which we are thrilled is included within the Committee’s programme – aims to understand the impacts of these various challenges as well as to act as a catalyst for the subsequent development of a global strategy for the child rights movement to respond to those challenges. We are delighted that some Committee members have agreed to make interventions in different parts of the conference and we hope that all of you can join us to reflect and brainstorm on how to move forward.

We are also enthusiastic that the High Commissioner for Human Rights will participate in-person and the Executive Director of UNICEF through a video statement. This is a strong signal of UN support to the child rights movement. We hope that discussions will help strengthen OHCHR and UNICEF’s own responses to the pushback on child rights, including the High Commissioner’s initiative for the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. We welcome the partnership we have with his Office under that initiative to ensure that children’s views can contribute to his vision statement on the future of human rights as well as the next Operational Management Plan of the OHCHR.

Before closing, allow me to reiterate our very great concern about UNOG’s decision to stop providing interpretation for online meetings. There is no doubt that this will undermine all we have achieved to expand civil society and child participation through the digital shift triggered by the covid-19 pandemic. We have called on the High Commissioner to take action and ensure that Committee pre-sessions are safeguarded.

I thank you.

Alex Conte
Executive Director
child rights connect