



child rights connect

WORKING GROUP ON CHILD RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENT

27 June 2023

Statement to be delivered by Save the Children, **on behalf of Child Rights Connect WG on CR and environment on item 6. *Thematic session on the promotion of the principles of the Convention in international forums***

Distinguished representatives, Parties to the Aarhus Convention,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the Child Rights Connect WG on child rights and environment. We are delighted to participate to this meeting for the first time and we look forward to exploring opportunities for further collaboration as our agendas are the same.

Child participation is one of the 4 guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention defines **the meaningful participation of children to decision making processes that affect them directly**, through a group of articles addressing all its aspect: the right to freedom of expression, thought, conscience, religion, association, peaceful assembly, protection of privacy and access to information (Articles 13 – 17 of the CRC), all of which are also **at the core of the Aarhus Convention.**

We are aware and welcome the work of the Aarhus Convention to include youth in its deliberations. We would like to invite you to open spaces also for children as they are more vulnerable and face more challenges than youth. Children are **most affected by environmental degradation and climate change**, and they are affected differently in different stages of their development. Reports show that children are uniquely susceptible to health-related harm from an unhealthy environment due to the physical and mental developmental differences from adults. WHO has found that every year an **estimated 1.7 million children under the age of 5, a quarter of all infant deaths worldwide**, die prematurely from modifiable environmental factors, especially air and water pollution and poor sanitation. This negative impact inevitably affects children and future generations, not only because environmental degradation affects children's lives and health in an irreversible manner, but also because the current environmental context presents a level of uncertainty that results in children having a different perception of their future than the one we had at their age.



There are other factors that accentuate children’s vulnerability such as the fact that they **do not have the right to vote**, and therefore have no formal political power to make their governments listen to them. In our work with children, we found that their participation in social discussions has allowed us to access information about what happens within children’s homes that we would have never known if we had not given them the space to voice their concerns.

But children are also agents of change. Faced with inaction from adults, children have started mobilizing around the world through different channels, for example the strikes called **Fridays for Future** led by children and youth. Children are suing governments and corporations - 26% of cases filed globally prior to 2021 – have involved plaintiffs who are children under the age of 18. As their action increases, children become targets of government retaliation, as expressed by Raina, the environmental defender and climate activist from Germany in her intervention yesterday.

Aarhus Convention is “the temple” of environmental democracy and this is why we come to you to help us enhance the participation of children in your deliberations at international level, as per the Almaty Guidelines, and promote the meaningful and safe mechanisms for children participation at the national level.