



10th anniversary of OPIC-CRC: 10 years delivering justice to children

Opening remarks by Child Rights Connect

Date: September 12th

Time: 15 :00-16 :45

Venue: Palais des Nations, room XVII

Distinguished excellencies, Members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and colleagues present here and online,

It is a pleasure for Child Rights Connect to take part in today's celebration of the 10th anniversary of OPIC and reflect on the importance of this instrument to ensure access to justice for children and, in particular, the key role that civil society has played and will continue playing in **enhancing children's pathways for access to justice through OPIC**.

Civil society actors have been key players in two major ways. On the one hand, by supporting efforts to increase ratification of OPIC so that it is an access to justice pathway at the international level that **is** available to children. On the other hand, by leading efforts to enhance the **effective** use of OPIC. Each of those roles involve an array of potential avenues of work, most of which are interlinked.

On the first point, it is clear, that if OPIC is to be an access to justice pathway for child victims of rights violations, ratification **is necessary**. To increase ratification, we have **focused on promoting understanding around OPIC and clarifying misconceptions**. We understood from our roundtable discussion convened around the 5th anniversary of OPIC that lack of ratification was mostly due to practical and/or perceived barriers by States that could be overcome through a) better awareness and understanding of the instrument and its dimensions and b) the exchange of good practices amongst States and with the CRC Committee. And therefore, this has been a priority for us.

Civil society organizations have also been key in leading campaigning efforts at the national level for ratification countering apathy or lack of attention by States. It is also important to acknowledge some of these campaigns have actually been child-led pushing for ratification and implementation.

Regarding the second role I mentioned, civil society has been key to ensure that OPIC is not only an **available** pathway for access to justice, but also that it is used **effectively**. From the global to the national scale, this means:

1. Raising the awareness of children of their **right** to seek remedies and reparation through OPIC, and of CSOs who may support their action. Unless OPIC is known, it won't be used.
2. Raising the knowledge and skills of children and supporting CSOs of **how** to make use of OPIC, including through awareness-raising, capacity-building, and technical advice on the possibility of bringing a complaint/inquiry requests.
3. Bringing cases to OPIC on behalf of child victims or contributing to the cases through third party submissions
4. Taking measures to ensure that **national pathways** for A2J are available and accessible, because OPIC should be an avenue of last resort.

Concerning the last point, I would like to reiterate that what is most important is that child victims can receive redress and that measures are taken to ensure that future violations don't occur.

Ultimately, this is what we are trying to achieve. For this purpose, national pathways for A2J that are available and accessible for child victims are key.

Finally, in a world in which so many children are victims of human rights violations, and where their access to effective remedies and reparation is imperative, it is also important to reflect on the increased challenges that we face as a child rights community to enhance children's pathways for access to justice.

In recent years, we are facing an increased, and increasingly well-mobilized, backlash against child rights defenders and a shrinking space for civil society, at national, regional and global levels. These trends have translated into reduced funding for civil society actors generally, and for those working in child rights as well as for children themselves as child human rights defenders.

Let's use this occasion of the 10th anniversary to call for renewed efforts to ensure that OPIC is an available and effective tool to ensure access to justice for children and call for a revitalized push to ensure ratification as well as the necessary resources for the Committee and OHCHR to ensure the effectiveness of this instrument.

Thank you very much.

Child Rights Connect