

Statement of the 66¹ Members of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs at the 2022 High Level Political Forum

Delivered by H.E. Brian Wallace, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations

Excellencies,

I am pleased to address the High-Level Political Forum this year on behalf of 66 members of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs.

We are at a critical moment in our journey towards sustainable development. Two years since the COVID-19 pandemic began, we are experiencing increasing global economic distress, and a cascade of new and protracted crises. The pandemic has exacerbated the lingering inequalities that are preventing us from achieving the SDGs – taking a huge toll on the world’s most disadvantaged children and youth. It is estimated that 100 million more children have fallen into poverty and an additional 9 million children are at risk of child labour by the end of 2022.

As we stand less than a decade away from the deadline set for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, our actions and work on the SDGs — as governments, as institutions, as UN agencies, as individuals – become more crucial. Yes, we are at a juncture, but we have a window of opportunity.

We must act urgently to alleviate these adverse impacts and ensure that children and young people are at the heart of our efforts and become our partners in action.

Of primary concern is learning. Even before the pandemic, the world was in the depths of a learning crisis. Now, nearly two-thirds of 10-year-olds globally are unable to read a simple

¹ Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Dominican Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Ethiopia, El Salvador, European Union* (observer), Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Korea (Republic of), Lithuania, Luxembourg, Lesotho, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Panama, Pakistan, Peru, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uganda, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay

story, limiting their future education and employment opportunities. The basics of literacy and numeracy create the foundation on which children build their futures, and that of their families and communities. It is impossible to build back better and advance the implementation of the SDGs if a generation is not empowered with the quality learning and skills that are their right.

As a result of global challenges such as armed conflict, displacement and child marriages, over 11 million girls may never return to the classroom, and, within this decade, 10 million more girls may be forced into child marriage. If we are to achieve the SDGs in this Decade of Action, we need to ensure all children are accounted for. This means continued investment in disaggregated data and in the resources to help those who have fallen behind to catch up.

Making progress on the indicators and targets of SDG 4 will enable progress in all other SDGs. Therefore, we call upon Member States to invest in policies, plans and strategies that prioritize foundational skills, increase remedial learning and develop children's wellbeing, so they are ready to learn.

To quote a young advocate from Jamaica, Mr Keino King, who addressed our Group last month on this very issue: “Every child can learn; every child must learn.” Let us come together at the Transforming Education Summit on 19 September and commit to addressing the learning crisis as a priority.

Excellencies,

Achieving the SDGs requires us to put children and young people at the heart of our efforts. This means not only prioritizing issues that affect them but also including them in decision-making processes and in co-creating solutions.

Let us continue to listen to the concerns of children, their lived experiences and, most importantly, their ideas on how to address the issues that concern them the most. This starts with teaching them the critical basic skills necessary for all future learning and ensuring they

play a key role in shaping future education systems that are equitable for every child, including the most marginalized.

Several years ago, our Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs took the decision to have children and young speakers at every single one of our meetings in order to hear first-hand how they are affected and what they want us to do both for them and with them. Let us work with the current and future generations to create a more just and equal world for all our children and youth. Listening to the voices and ideas of children and youth helps us progress and shape a brighter, more prosperous future for us all.

Thank you.
