

## Committee on the Rights of the Child

Contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in response to the 2024 call for inputs to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)

### 1. Introduction

This submission is made by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee) as a response to the invitation extended to various functional commissions and other intergovernmental bodies and forums by the President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to provide inputs to the 2024 HLPF on its review of a number of SDGs under the theme “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions”.

It is indicated that the HLPF in 2024 will review in depth “Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere; Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development”.

It is to be recalled that the CRC Committee has provided inputs in previous rounds focusing on various SDGs.<sup>1</sup> This submission is on SDG 13 and SDG 16.3 to promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.

### 2. SDG 13

The Committee on the Rights of the Child recognises that the implementation of the SDG 13 – “take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts” is jeopardised by the insufficient progress in achieving international commitments to limit global warming. This exposes children to continuous and rapidly increasing harms associated with greater concentrations of greenhouse gas emissions and the resulting temperature increases.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly addresses environmental issues in article 24 (2) (c), by which States parties are obliged to take measures to combat disease and malnutrition, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution, and in article 29 (1) (e), by which States parties are required to direct the education of children to the development of respect for the natural environment. Since the adoption of the Convention, growing acceptance has emerged of the wide-ranging interconnections between children’s rights and environmental protection.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2022 input of the CRC Committee focused on SDGs: 4 on quality education, 5 on gender equality, and 17 on partnerships. The 2023 input of the CRC Committee focused on SDGs 9 and 17.

For the period between March 2022 and March 2024, 44 States parties were reviewed under the Convention and the Committee expressed more than 120 concerns and recommendations on environmental related rights. The brief review of these Concluding observations illustrates that the range of issues related to the environmental crisis and climate change has significantly increased, if compared with the period until 2016, when the Committee held its Day of General Discussion on children’s rights and the environment. In 2022-2023, the Committee, together with Terre des Hommes, Child Rights Connect and OHCHR, has carried out a global consultation with children while drafting [its General Comment No. 26](#) (2023) on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change.

The Committee benefited immeasurably from the contributions of over 16,000 children, from 121 countries, through online surveys, focus groups and in-person national and regional consultations. The children consulted reported on the negative effects of environmental degradation and climate change on their lives and communities and asserted their right to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

In its [General Comment No. 26 \(2023\)](#), adopted at its 93th session, the Committee emphasizes the urgent need to address the adverse effects of environmental degradation, with a special focus on climate change, on the enjoyment of children’s rights, and recommends to the State parties actions that are relevant to all five targets under Goal 13.

The Committee promotes a holistic understanding of children’s rights as they apply to environmental protection and recognized children’s right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. This right is implicit in the Convention, and directly linked to, in particular, the rights to life, survival and development (art. 6), the highest attainable standard of health, including ‘taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution’ (art. 24), an adequate standard of living (art. 27) and education, including the development of respect for the natural environment (art. 29).

Substantive elements of this right are profoundly important for children, as they include clean air, a stable climate, healthy ecosystems and biodiversity, safe and sufficient water, healthy and sustainable food, and non-toxic environments. Procedural elements, including access to information, participation in decision-making and child-friendly access to justice, with effective remedies, have equal importance to the empowerment of children, including through education, to become agents of their own destiny.

### **Recommendations and key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2024 HLPF**

States parties to the Convention have the obligations to undertake legislative, administrative and other appropriate measures, including child-sensitive, multifaceted programmes, that enhance the climate and disaster resilience of children, reduce the negative impact of environmental degradation and pollution and promote low carbon development and environmental sustainability. The General Comment No. 26 is instrumental to strengthen the national services and systems that children need to survive, grow and thrive in the face of climate threats and disasters.

States parties should also equip children, their parents and communities with the knowledge, skills and supplies they need to protect themselves before disaster strikes and strengthen national and subnational preparedness systems. To this end governments should integrate issues related to air and environment pollution and climate change and disaster risk management into the national school curriculum as well as in teachers' training.

The General Comment No.26 underlines the importance to support children's activism and movement for climate justice to be more visible and heard at the regional and national platforms and to engage with governments, business sectors, financial institutions, among others.

The States should ensure that child human rights defenders, including those working on land rights, pollution, climate change, and access to natural resources, are protected against intimidation, harassment, and violence. Children's views should be proactively sought and given due weight in the design and implementation of measures aimed at addressing the significant and long-term environmental challenges and particularly in shaping adaptation measures, including disaster risk reduction, response and recovery measures. To empower children in disadvantaged situations, such as children with disabilities, children belonging to minority groups and children living in vulnerable areas, may require additional support.

The Committee's view is that the exercise by children of their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, to information and education, to participate and be heard and to effective remedies can result in more rights-compliant, and therefore more ambitious and effective, environmental policies. It is, therefore, essential that child rights - including their right to participate - are integrated into climate action and the negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This integration not only gives voice to the generation inheriting this planet but also ensures intergenerational equity and resilience.

### **3. SDG 16.3**

Since 2017, the Committee has devoted paragraphs and a large part of its general comments to children's right to access to justice, such as General Comment No. 21 (2017) on children in street situations, para 22; General Comment No. 23 (2017) on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return, paras. 14 and 19; General Comment No. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system; General Comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, paras. 43-49, General Comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change, paras. 82-90.

Relevant for achieving SDG 16.3, the Committee is preparing a new [General Comment No. 27](#) on children's right to access to justice and effective remedies. Unlike General Comment No. 24, which focused mainly on children in conflict with the law, General Comment No. 27 aims to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of children's right to access to justice and effective remedies.

## Recommendations and key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2024 HLPF.

Despite the progress made by States parties under their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a vast majority of children are still not able to enjoy their right to access to justice and effective remedies in their respective countries:

- Some members of societies, for instance, remain convinced that it is either unacceptable or unconceivable for children to exercise this right. These attitudes often impede children from accessing justice;
- Some children are simply unaware of their rights or existing complaint mechanisms;
- Legal processes are rarely child friendly;
- Some violations go unreported because children fear reprisals or distrust the system;
- Socio-economic and cultural factors can also obstruct children's right to access to justice.

In light of these observations, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends the following measures in order to fully achieve SDG 16.3:

- Ensure that all children have access to effective, confidential, child-friendly and multisectoral remedies, including by removing barriers, putting in place appropriate and effective remedial judicial and non-judicial mechanisms, expanding the types of support provided under the legal aid for violations of children's rights that are widely known and readily available to all children and their representatives, including for children victims of abuses by businesses, victims and survivors of violence, children in disadvantaged situations, children who are victims or witnesses of violence, children at risk of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, children deprived of liberty, placed in alternative care settings and facilities for asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children;
- Provide the police and the judiciary with systematic training on children's rights to avoid re-traumatization and violations of children's rights and to ensure judgments consistent with children's rights;
- Educate children on their right to file a complaint under national, regional, and international complaint mechanisms;
- Prioritize non-judicial measures over judicial measures, such as psycho-social support, diversion, and mediation;
- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.