Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Guests, Forum Participants!

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan I would like to welcome you in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan and express our appreciation for your participation in the work of the 4th Central Asian Forum on Child Protection and Well-being.

It will be observed that the organization of this international forum shows that governments and civil society in our countries attach a great importance to issues related to protection of child rights and establishment of the best conditions for their harmonious development.

The Republic of Tajikistan has in place a certain legislative framework for child rights protection which is in compliance with international standards in this area. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was one of the first international legal acts that Tajikistan acceded to upon gaining of its independence. This regulatory legal act came into legal force in our country back in 1993. The issues of children's access to education, health care and social welfare, being a priority, has always been and will be in the future closely monitored by the Leadership of the Republic. Since 2008, the National Commission on Protection of Child Rights was established and has been active to address existing problems and develop a modern social policy, and coordinate activities of public executive authorities involved in the process of protection of child rights.

**Children are our future.** This phrase has a deep meaning. Children are the embodiment and implementation of their parents' dreams and hopes that failed to come true. This is why we wish to bring our children up in such a way that they
achieve greater success in their lives than we have in ours. There is no other alternative for sustainable development of the society.

Children are our future and this future must be better than today. Future begins today - the foundation for the future must be laid at present. With this principle in mind Tajikistan pursues a set of reforms focused on improving condition of children. This being said, we pay a special attention to issues of orphaned children, children with disabilities and children from poor families. The President of the Republic of Tajikistan, His Excellence Emomali Rahmon, has repeatedly addressed such children saying: "You are not alone. We will never leave you in need of anything".

_During a recent meeting with community leaders of the country the head of state appealed to the participants never to forget about orphaned children and children with disabilities emphasizing that caring about such children is the civil and sacred duty of every single person._

The president also noted that we must instill in our children morality, humanism, patriotism and striving for ennoblement of their motherland so that they observe the best human customs, study sciences, acquire new knowledge, master foreign languages as well as modern professions and crafts. If our children grow up well-educated and enlightened, competent and knowledgeable our country will prosper and the state will become more potent.

I have already mentioned above that ensuring children's access to education is a priority area for concerned public authorities of our country in the sphere of education. Over the recent 10 years, to establish conditions for enjoyment of the right to education guaranteed by the country's Constitution several regulatory legal acts were developed and adopted including the Laws of the Republic of Tajikistan "On education", "On parents' responsibility for upbringing of their children", etc. A new draft law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On public support to orphaned children" is currently under development.

There are funds allocated in the state budget on an annual basis for construction and up-keeping of boarding schools, medical and social institutions providing services to children, including children with disabilities. It must be
admitted that on account of the public budget limitations our government is unable to grant requests for funding to construct new educational institutions it receives from all regions. To address this problem in a staged manner the Government of the Republic has adopted a State Target-Oriented Program for Construction of New and Rehabilitation of Existing Schools of General Education.

It should also be pointed out that, in April 2011, the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, adopted the National Concept of Inclusive Education for children with disabilities for 2011-2015. In accordance with the Concept Tajikistan will launch a reform of its education system to ensure access to education for children with disabilities. The adoption of this concept was another step towards achievement of equal rights and opportunities for all children.

There has also been a certain progress with regard to reforming of the social protection system. From 2005 up to now, a number of laws and regulations were passed, including the Concept of Social Protection, Laws of the Republic of Tajikistan "On social services", "On social protection of people with disabilities", "On public social standards", "On public procurement of social services". The draft Concept of development of social services has been developed and is being finalized. In Tajikistan, establishment of day-care centers and nurseries for children with disabilities started in 2007. As of today, 14 such centers are operational providing services to more than 1,860 citizens. Activities of such centers are funded based on the principle of social services procurement, i.e. the service providers or suppliers are non-governmental, non-commercial organizations (NGOs) selected on a competitive basis.

To attract children from poor families to schools the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan adopted and gave effect to its resolution dated 2 May 2007 "On payment of benefits to poor families having children attending schools".

With support from an EU project an Innovative Social Work Training Center was established in 2012 by decision of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan to be used as a leading methodological and training social work center. The key objective of the center is to provide retraining and professional development for staff of social institutions, train them in modern methods of provision of social
services and support in development and introduction of social work standards. For example, more than 1,000 children received different services from local social services departments, day-care centers and nurseries and at home. About 100 children learned blue-collar professions through vocational training courses. Prevention of the worst forms of child labor is another urgent cross-sectoral problem which should be addressed by competent authorities. Tajikistan has ratified the UN Convention in this area and steps are currently taken to comply with the Convention requirements.

It also stands to mention that, in Tajikistan, the task of monitoring situation with child labor is assigned to the State Inspectorate for labor, social protection and pensions under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection.

Several years ago, the civil society and mass media expressed their concern about involvement of underage children in cotton harvesting in Central Asian region. To prohibit such practice the Government of Tajikistan adopted a special instruction regarding inadmissibility of diverting children from the education process during the cotton harvesting season and injoined on responsible authorities to strengthen their control over compliance with the legislation. Today, I can note with satisfaction that the practice of involvement of underage children in cotton harvesting in Tajikistan has become a thing of the past.

The problem of domestic violence is yet another important aspect of ensuring protection of child rights. To address this problem the Parliament of Tajikistan developed and adopted the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On prevention of domestic violence towards women and children". At present, to ensure that provisions of that law become operational integrated measures need to be implemented including development of several regulations.

Dear Forum Participants,

I would like to say that most of problems related to child rights are of cross-sectoral nature. For example, issues of inclusive education, establishment of a barrier-free and friendly environment, social integration and combatting stigma with regard to children with disabilities will be impossible to address without active involvement
of persons with disabilities themselves, the civil sector and international community. In this connection I would like to dwell upon a very important area of cooperation with international organizations. I refer to coordination of efforts in the process of sectoral reforms and financial support and promotion of modern social policy approaches.

To coordinate efforts and activities of different social sector agencies aimed at protection of children’s rights and interests the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan has established an Intersectoral Working Group including experts and professionals from both public agencies and non-governmental organizations. The international donor community plays an important role in driving reforms in Tajikistan. As far as issues of child rights are concerned, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is the leading actor in this process. We have also established a good level of cooperation with the European Union, German Agency for International Cooperation, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, Imdod Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran and many other international financial institutions providing support in development of our country.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
I believe exchange of opinions on issues included in the Forum agenda and sharing experiences in addressing these problems will be very useful. I would like to express my confidence that the Dushanbe Forum will become a platform where we will be able to develop practical proposals with regard to the issues under discussion. Doubtless, we need to learn from experiences of our closest neighbors and opinions of the leading international experts who undertook monitoring and analysis of the current laws in the region and activities of institutions working with children. In our view it is essential to use this foothold to propose new ideas and recommendation that can improve lives of our children and make them happier.

In conclusion, allow me to welcome all of you once again at the Fourth Central Asian Forum for Child Protection and, last but not least, express our high appreciation to the organizers for the good work and establishment of a positive environment for the activities at the Forum.
Thank you for your attention.