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# DECLARATION ON CHILDREN, YOUTH AND CLIMATE ACTION

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## SUPPORTING GUIDANCE

*Considering* that children face heightened and specific risks due to climate change, that these impacts are already occurring, and that the most disadvantaged and marginalized children bear the heaviest burden;

*Acknowledging* the global leadership and calls of children and young people for urgent and immediate climate action, as well as their critical role as agents of change;

*Recalling* the commitment made in Article 2 of the Paris Agreement to limit the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, as well as the global goal on adaptation in Article 7, recognizing that these commitments would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change,

*Reaffirming* the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and all human rights instruments relevant to the protection, promotion, respect and fulfilment of the human rights of all children and young people;

*Recalling* the Paris Agreement commitment by States to respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, including the rights of children, and intergenerational equity, when taking action to address climate change;

*Recalling* also Human Rights Council Resolutions 37/8, 35/20 and 40/11 which address the rights of children and young people with respect to environmental harm and climate change, and that a safe climate is a vital element of the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment and is essential to human life and well-being;

More than 1.7 million children under the age of five lose their lives each year as a result of preventable forms of environmental harm, many of which are contributing to, or exacerbated by, climate change. More than half a billion children live in areas at extremely high risk of floods, 160 million live in areas experiencing high levels of drought, and by 2040, 1 in 4 children will live in areas of extreme water stress. Children are disproportionately vulnerable due to their unique stage of physiological and mental development. Nearly 90 per cent of the burden of disease attributable to climate change is borne by children under the age of five.

Children facing intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities, including girls, children with disabilities, indigenous children, migrant children, and children living in poverty, bear the heaviest burden of all. Children living in areas that face unique climate challenges, such as Small Island Developing States, also face heightened exposure and risks.

**In each of the commitments below, these disproportionate impacts, as well as the additional barriers that these groups of children may face with respect to participation and inclusion, should be considered and addressed through specific measures to ensure inclusion and non-discrimination.**

## Commit, therefore, to consider:

- 1. Advocating for global recognition and fulfilment of children’s inalienable right to a healthy environment**, and to take steps to enshrine this right where appropriate into national, regional and global frameworks and/or national policies and legislation;

The right to a healthy environment is recognized by 80% of UN Member States in either national or international law, and was formally recognized at the global level by the Human Rights Council in October 2021 and by the UN General Assembly in July 2022. Global recognition sends a powerful signal that this right must be universally protected, respected and fulfilled, while catalysing action to strengthen policies, legal provisions and – crucially – implementation. It will also enhance accountability and accelerate efforts to meet the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals.

**There can be no doubt that efforts to fulfil the right to a healthy environment is of particular significance for children**, given their heightened vulnerabilities and the additional barriers they face with respect to exercising their rights to access information and education, to be heard, and to seek access to justice for violations of their rights due to environmental harm. The Human Rights Council has acknowledged the wide-sweeping effects of environmental harm, including climate change, on children’s rights, as well as the role that recognition of the right to a healthy environment at the national level has played to “promote justiciability, strengthen accountability and facilitate greater participation, improving environmental protection and performance and ensuring rights for present and future generations.”

### Governments can:

- Incorporate stronger normative standards to advance children’s environmental rights in national, regional and international frameworks, and call for new, dedicated and universal commitments by States.
- Enshrine and/or strengthen implementation of this right in your national Constitution and/or legislation, as well as regional and international treaties and frameworks.
- Call for greater coherence between the work of international and national bodies addressing climate change, environmental degradation and human rights, including those overseeing standards relevant to children’s rights.

### Resources/Guidance:

- [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment No. 26 on the Environment, with a special focus on climate change.](#)
- Human Rights Council resolution [48/13](#) on the human right to a healthy environment
- Human Rights Council resolution [45/30](#) on Rights of the Child: realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment (2020)
- Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Environment, [Children’s rights and the environment \(2018\)](#)
- Human Rights Council [resolution](#), OHCHR [report](#) (2017) and [briefing note](#) (2020) on climate change and the rights of the child

- 2. Enhancing efforts to respect, promote and consider the rights of children and young people** in implementation of the Paris Agreement at all levels, including recognition of their specific vulnerabilities, as well as their status as key stakeholders and implementers, in countries’ national climate adaptation and

mitigation measures, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and long-term greenhouse gas emissions development strategies, including consideration of the particular role and responsibilities of the private sector;

The Paris Agreement states that Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, including the rights of children and the principle of intergenerational equity. However, consideration of children remains minimal in climate-related policies, action and decision-making processes. Just 34% of updated or revised NDCs submitted in 2020/2021 under the Paris Agreement were assessed as child-sensitive. While NAPs are more likely to mention children and youth, substantial progress is required to recognize children and young people as rights-holders and agents of change, rather than as passive victims, and to embed child- and youth-responsive measures.

At a fundamental level, protecting children's rights through these key policies means adopting a sufficient level of ambition to rapidly limit global temperature rise, in line with the best available science, and significantly increasing investment in targeted adaptation measures to protect against impacts that are already occurring and set to increase. Yet collective ambition to cut emissions is radically off track and climate finance for adaptation remains chronically underfunded. The urgent priority must be the implementation of transformative climate action.

**As a cross-cutting priority, climate policies and plans should explicitly recognise children's rights and children's voices. This can best be achieved by prioritizing adaptation and mitigation co-benefits across the social sectors upon which children depend, and by enabling the meaningful participation of children in policy-making processes.**

Regulation with respect to the private sector's significant contribution to climate change should also be considered, including strengthening and enforcement of environmental standards, and measures to ensure that businesses meet their responsibilities to respect children's rights, including in climate action.

#### **Governments can:**

- Explicitly recognize children's rights and voices in revised NDCs, NAPs, long-term greenhouse gas emissions development strategies, and SDG13 implementation and associated plans, ensuring alignment with the goals of the Paris Agreement and SDGs.
- Advocate for wider recognition and mainstreaming of children's rights and voices in UNFCCC processes and decisions, since these shape national and regional level policies, processes and action.
- Strengthen regulation to ensure that businesses abide by environmental standards, and mandate child/human rights and environmental due diligence, including with respect to climate change.

#### **Resources/Guidance:**

- UNICEF (2021), [Making Climate Policies for and with Children and Young People](#)
- UNICEF (2020), [Are climate change policies child-sensitive? A Guide for Action.](#)
- UNICEF and NDC Partnership: [Youth and 2020 NDCs: A driving force for higher climate ambition](#)
- [NDC Youth Engagement Plan](#)
- UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013) [General Comment No. 16](#) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights
- International Chamber of Commerce (2021), [Business Statement on Children and Climate Change](#)

**3. Scaling up and accelerating investment in child- and youth-responsive adaptation, disaster risk reduction and mitigation measures**, cognizant of an urgent need to focus on reaching children most at risk, and advocate for child-sensitive criteria to be mainstreamed in multilateral funds;

A significant scaling up of investment in adaptation is needed to protect children from the impacts of climate change that are already occurring, and those that will occur in future. Child- and youth-responsive adaptation, disaster risk reduction and mitigation measures in the social sectors on which children are most dependent, such as water, health and education, would deliver multiple co-benefits. Evidence suggests that [public finance that is child-sensitive yields higher social and economic returns](#), since investments during childhood are relatively cost-effective, contributing significantly to adult outcomes by increasing the health, education and well-being of a population, and reducing inequalities. Implementing such an approach will require much greater consideration of children and youth in national and global climate finance mechanisms.

**Governments can:**

- Ensure that their global climate finance commitments are met, increasing the proportion that flows to adaptation and resilience-building, and that finance for adaptation is doubled by 2025.
- Accelerate investment in child- and youth-responsive adaptation, disaster risk and mitigation measures, notably in the water, health and education sectors, prioritizing interventions that reach children most at risk.
- Mainstream child-sensitive criteria in national and multilateral climate financing mechanisms.

**Resources/Guidance:**

- UNICEF, Global Water Partnership: [WASH Climate Resilient Development Strategic Framework](#)
- UNICEF (2021), [Healthy Environments for Healthy Children: Global Programme Framework](#)
- UNICEF (2019), [It is getting hot: call for education systems to respond to the climate crisis](#)
- ODI (2011) [Investment in children](#)

**4. Strengthening the capacity of children and young people on climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts** by establishing and investing in climate change and environmental education, and equipping children and young people with the knowledge and skills required to protect themselves and contribute to a safe and sustainable future, ensuring that such efforts reach marginalized children and youth;

The importance of environmental education is explicitly recognised in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that one of the principle aims of education “shall be directed to ... the development of respect for the natural environment” (Article 29). SDG indicator 13.3.1 focuses on integration of mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning in curricula at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Enhancing children’s knowledge and skills with respect to climate change and environmental degradation, including green skills and preparedness, empowers them to protect themselves from risks, and to advocate and engage meaningfully in decision-making as agents of change.

**Governments can:**

- Introduce/strengthen formal and non-formal climate and environmental education for all children, throughout the educational process

- Integrate children's education in national and international climate policies and plans, including Action for Climate Empowerment national strategies.

#### Resources/guidance:

- UN CC: Learn, [Integrating Climate Change in Education at Primary and Secondary Level](#)
- UNICEF (2012), Scaling Up and Mainstreaming Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction in the Education Sector, [Resource Manual](#)
- Brookings Institute, Plan International and UNICEF: [Girls' education in climate strategies](#)
- UNICEF (2019), [It is getting hot: call for education systems to respond to the climate crisis](#)

### **5. Enhancing the meaningful participation of children and youth in climate change processes**, including through the Action for Climate Empowerment dialogue, by participating in the Youth Delegate Programme in the UNFCCC, and examining opportunities to meaningfully support YOUNGO priorities and the participation of young people, with a focus on the Global South;

Guidance for commitments 5 and 6 are presented together in the box under commitment 6 below.

### **6. Exploring measures to establish an international Commission for Children and Future Generations**, as well as new or existing mechanisms at the national level to ensure the effective participation of children and youth in decision making on climate change;

Children and youth have consistently proven that they are powerful agents of change with respect to the climate crisis and environmental degradation, and rightly see inaction on these issues as a violation of their rights and an existential threat to their future. Climate policies at all levels must be informed by, and provide for, the systematic consultation and meaningful participation of children, including particular efforts to reach marginalized children and youth.

#### Governments can:

- Establish child-friendly mechanisms and platforms to facilitate children's engagement in climate-related policy processes at national and international levels, including e.g. Children's Parliaments, Children's Councils, and standing consultative committees that include children's perspectives.
- Support a dedicated focus on children's rights to environmental education and meaningful participation through the Glasgow Work Programme on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) adopted at COP26.
- Include youth delegates in Party's official UNFCCC Delegations, ensuring that they are adequately prepared and supported to engage meaningfully in the process.
- Support calls for capacity building and mobilization of resources to enhance meaningful youth participation, with a focus on the Global South and marginalised youth in particular.
- Support efforts to establish an independent International Commission for Children and Future Generations or similar mechanism to represent and advocate for their rights in decision-making and ensure that commitments to intergenerational equity in international agreements and UN resolutions are applied in practice. The UN Secretary General's Our Common Agenda and the appointment of a Special Envoy for Future Generations to explore this and other options present important opportunities to advance this commitment.

#### Resources/Guidance

- UNICEF, [Tools for Young Climate Activists](#) (including a toolkit in [English](#) and [Spanish](#))

- YOUNGO (2017) [Submission](#) on enhancing training, public awareness, participation and access to information under the Paris Agreement
- [Climate Youth Negotiators Programme](#)
- Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice (2017) [Global Guardians: A Voice for Future Generations](#)
- UN Secretary General (2021) [Our Common Agenda](#)

**7. Adopting institutional and administrative measures, as well as partnerships, at national and international levels to actively pursue the above objectives**, and to enhance coherence and a cross-cutting focus on children and youth in climate action, including with respect to UNFCCC decision-making processes and workstreams, and implementation of the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals.

Implementation of these commitments can be supported by enhancing policy coherence and accountability with respect to the integration of children's rights in climate, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable development strategies and plans at all levels, and by establishing partnerships to progress these goals.

**Governments can:**

- Strengthen consideration of children's rights with respect to climate change through, *inter alia*, UNFCCC and Paris Agreement decision making processes and implementation, SDG voluntary national reviews, through the universal periodic review mechanism under the Human Rights Council, and in reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of Child.

**Resources/Guidance**

- Children's Environmental Rights Initiative (2020), [Guidance on Reporting on children's rights and the environment](#) under the UNCRC, Paris Agreement and SDGs