

## **Joint Statement of 69<sup>i</sup> Members of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs at the UN Water Conference**

Excellencies,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of 69 members of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs. Our Group was created in 2015 when the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was being negotiated in order to ensure that the rights of the child are considered and fully integrated in the implementation of the SDGs.

The world is in the depths of a water, sanitation and hygiene crisis, which has a direct impact on children's lives, rights and well-being, and undermines our collective ability to achieve the 2030 Agenda. We note that the progress on water related goals and targets remains alarmingly off-track. Almost half of the world's population do not have safely managed sanitation at home, a quarter do not have safe drinking water and nearly a third do not have a place to wash their hands with water and soap.

This inequity exposes populations to life-threatening diseases, malnutrition and economic reversals. It forces families to make painful choices between engaging in work and schooling, and collecting water. Children, especially the most vulnerable, are most at risk of these painful sacrifices.

Unsafe water and poor sanitation and hygiene can be life-threatening for children. Every day, more than 1,000 children die from illnesses caused by unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene. In the absence of safe water and sanitation, children are more likely to miss school. The absence of safe water and sanitation can also increase the risks of disease outbreaks, inter-communal tension and population displacement, which further negatively impact children's rights, lives and well-being.

These challenges are exacerbated by climate change, which threatens to undo decades of progress towards achieving SDG 6. Over 90 percent of natural disasters are water-related, including droughts, floods and tropical storms – all of which are only increasing in frequency and severity. These extreme weather events can have a devastating impact on water resources, leading to water scarcity and droughts, and destroying water and sanitation infrastructure by way of extreme heat or flooding.

Similarly, protracted conflict is compounding the risks associated with unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene. 670 million – over a third of the world's children – are currently living in fragile settings. This number is expected to rise by 30 percent by 2050. These children are 20 times more likely to die of diseases linked to unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene than from bombs or bullets.

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation should not be a privilege. It is a basic human right, enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As governments, we are responsible for these children, and it is our duty to uphold this right.

Achieving SDG 6 by 2030 will require quadrupling our efforts and collective action to ensure access to water and sanitation for every child. In the least developed countries and fragile contexts, progress needs to ramp up to between 10 and 23 times its current rate to meet this target. We still cannot afford to lose sight of the challenges faced by the unserved pockets of people in low and lower middle income countries, as well as middle and high-income countries who are excluded from access.

This is a global challenge that demands joint leadership, resources and solutions to extend services to rural areas and poor and vulnerable populations. Let us use the occasion of the UN 2023 Water Conference to act now to achieve SDG 6 and ensure a better future for every child.

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