

Joint Statement on behalf of 53 Member States of the Group of Friends of Children and SDGs¹ at the 2017 Meeting of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF)

Delivered by H.E. Carole Dieschbourg, Minister for Environment of Luxembourg

New York, 17 July 2017

Mr. Chair,

Just last month, during one of the sessions of the first ever UN Global Oceans Conference, the UN Membership heard from Isabel and Melati Wijsen, sisters aged 14 and 16 from Bali who have successfully campaigned to phase out the use of plastic bags in Indonesia, and have inspired a global movement to reduce the use of plastics polluting our oceans. They told us: “young people may be 25% of the world’s population but we are 100% of the future.” Their words serve as a powerful reminder of the gravity of the decisions we take today, and the effect these decisions will have on current and future generations of children. And it is why we -- as Members of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs -- continue to champion for their rights and empowerment as “agents of change” in fora such as the HLPF, and in our respective actions to implement the SDGs within our own countries.

Our Group was formed during the SDG negotiations’ process with a very important mission - to ensure that children’s rights form an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and we managed to deliver on this ambitious mandate. Our contribution led to the adoption of a truly transformative and inclusive 2030 Agenda that recognizes children as agents of change and promises to leave no one behind. Following the adoption of the Agenda we have continued our work with the strong conviction that children’s participation is crucial for the successful implementation of this unique global instrument and for achieving sustainable future for all.

We recognize the value of being long-term advocates for children’s rights in SDG implementation processes from the local to the global level. Among the 44 countries who have submitted a

¹ Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Denmark, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, India, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Korea (Republic of), Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Panama, Pakistan, Peru, Romania, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay

Voluntary National Review to the HLPF this year, 20² of them are members of our Group and their review processes reflect their commitment to children's rights. For instance, through these reports we have learned of various national efforts to raise awareness of the SDGs among children in schools, increase child and youth participation through consultations and youth councils, as well as invest in children in order to secure a more prosperous and sustainable future for all.

The theme of the HLPF this year - "***Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world***" is particularly pertinent to children. Children are disproportionately living in extreme poverty. The consequences of growing up with inadequate nutrition; poor healthcare, water or sanitation; and without quality education often have long-term consequences for children and lead to growing deficits that cannot be overcome later, creating and unfortunately sustaining poverty for generations to come.

Ending child poverty in all its dimensions is a critical means to address the root causes of poverty, end inter-generational poverty and ensure a more prosperous future. Investing in all children from the earliest age and in children and youth through the second decade of life is imperative for building the human capital required to turn demographic transitions into growth dividends that reduce poverty and generate prosperity.

Finally, we would like to highlight the importance of building children's awareness of the SDGs as a way to inspire their actions on sustainable development in their communities and countries.

To quote the President of the General Assembly, his Excellency Ambassador Peter Thomson, "We need to teach our young people about the SDGs because for the required transformation to occur, it must first take hold of our minds and in our values. It is our children who will be inheritors of the agenda's result and so every classroom around the world should be teaching the SDGs and I encourage you all to achieve this reality."

As Members of the Group of Friends, we fully support this call by the PGA. The SDGs will be doomed to fail if we are not able to meaningfully engage our youngest citizens in implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda. It is our hope that all Member States will also heed this call.

Thank you.

² Countries participating in a 2017 VNR that are members of the GoF: Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Chile, Denmark, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Netherlands, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay.