

Joint Statement by 68ⁱ Members of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs at the 28th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP28)

Excellencies,

Children are growing up in a world of increasing dangers due to environmental degradation and climate change. Safeguarding children and future generations from escalating climate threats requires immediate and decisive action.

I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of 68 members of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs - a group of Member States who are committed to advocating for child rights, child well-being and meaningful child participation in UN intergovernmental processes and beyond.

Every child on this planet is being exposed to at least one major climate and environmental hazard, shock, or stress. Children are uniquely susceptible to climate change and environmental degradation due to physiological and developmental factors. UNICEF's report on *The Children's Climate Risk Index* highlights that almost 90% of the global disease burden associated with climate change is borne by children under the age of five.

Children's rights and environmental protection form a virtuous circle. The recently launched *General comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change*, by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child draws clear connections between the rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – ratified by 196 countries – and urgent climate action.

It states that children not only have the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, but that this right is a prerequisite for the full enjoyment of a broad range of children's rights. Environmental harm affects children's rights to life, survival, development, health, adequate standard of living and education. Climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss, as part of environmental degradation, are all closely linked to other fundamental challenges impeding the realization of these rights such as poverty, inequality, and conflict.

"The environment is our life." "I would like to tell [adults] that we are the future generations and, if you destroy the planet, where will we live?!" - These are the words of children during the consultations for General comment No. 26. During the last several years, children and youth have been the face of movements across the world calling for climate action, as this topic is highly important to them; they have a right to be heard.

As Parties to the UNFCCC, we have agreed that States should respect, promote and consider the rights of children, as well as intergenerational equity when taking climate action. It is incumbent upon us all to realize this commitment through our work here in Dubai, and the work undertaken in our respective countries. For example, analysis shows that the majority of Nationally Determined Contributions are not child-sensitive. They do not pay sufficient attention to the climate and disaster resilience of social services that are critical in ensuring the fulfilment of children's rights, such as healthcare, education, water systems, and food security. In addition, our

contributions are not always inclusive of children and young people's rights and roles as participants, stakeholders and drivers of change.

There is a clear need for greater guidance on how to elevate attention to the rights of children in all climate measures. That is why we are calling on all Parties to support an expert dialogue on children and climate action, to take place at the sixtieth session of the subsidiary bodies in June next year. We should also ensure that children's rights and intergenerational equity are embedded as core principles of the Global Stocktake output, the Global Goal on Adaptation Framework, and the governing instrument of the new Loss and Damage Fund.

The cost of not taking action today harms not only this generation of children but also those yet to come. We hope you will support this call to action, and work with us for a clean, healthy, and sustainable planet for every child. Thank you.

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