Statement at the 2024 High-Level Political Forum on behalf of members and observers of the Group of Friends of Children and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Excellencies,

I am pleased to address the High-Level Political Forum this year on behalf of 70 members of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs.

Eight years ago, this Group of Friends came together, guided by the vision of the 2030 Agenda to make the world a better place for current and future generations of children. We strive towards a world which invests in children, where all children can grow up free from exploitation and violence, and where they are equipped with the right tools and a nurturing environment in order to reach their full potential.

Today, with only 15% of the SDGs on track, we have a long way to go to fulfil this vision. Sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions are needed to accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs. These actions must be undertaken through a child-rights lens as the full realization of their rights, as outlined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), is inextricably linked to the successful achievement of the SDGs.

Excellencies, the theme of this year’s HLPF focuses on eradicating poverty in times of crisis. This is an issue that is incredibly pertinent for children, who are among the most vulnerable to the effects of poverty and crises.

Of the 333 million children still living in extreme poverty, 200 million live in conflict-ridden or fragile contexts. They are growing up in the face of violence, without quality education, nutrition, healthcare, or social protection. These are services to which they ought to have a guaranteed right of access.

Let us be clear: children living in poverty are experiencing a violation of their human rights. The mere existence of poverty indicates a severe ‘lack of’ and/or deprivation of fundamental resources - food, water, education, protection, shelter and more. It also threatens their future as persistent poverty perpetuates inter-generational cycles of deprivations. We can end child poverty by making the right policy choices, today. In doing so, we break that debilitating intergenerational cycle.

Excellencies, we know that the consequences of our decisions, actions and inactions will shape the future our children will inherit.

First, we must increase our investments in children in a more effective manner. Evidence shows that investing in children during their formative years is integral to reducing and preventing their poverty in the future. Today’s investments in critical areas for children, such as social protection and social services, are both too little and made far too late in their life course. This must change. We must be strategic.
Second, social protection and cash transfers, including child and family benefits, play a critical role. The evidence is clear: cash transfers reduce poverty, both monetary and multidimensional, and inequality while also stimulating broader positive economic impacts. Social protection systems also play a critical role in preventing and mitigating the impacts of shocks. Of the 4 billion people without effective social protection coverage, 1.77 billion – almost half - are children. We must therefore support strategies that allow for the transparent mobilization of public and private resources for social protection to ensure that children can reach their full potential.

If we are to break inter-generational cycles of poverty and create a world where no one is left behind, business as usual will not be good enough. Excellencies, what is needed now is an extraordinary and concerted effort to scale up policies and investments for children. This includes effective and meaningful engagement with children in the implementation and review of the SDGs. Children must have the opportunity to learn about the SDGs, be inspired to take action in their communities, and have their voices heard during consultations, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The SDGs must be delivered for and with all children. The 2030 Agenda brought together the economic, social and environmental pillars of development, thereby providing a framework for progress that can be achieved when all parts of society, including children, work together.

Achieving the SDGs for every child creates a pathway to systemic, structural and long-term positive change. We must set a course of action that guarantees a sustainable future for every child in every country around the world and ensures that every child has full access to the rights guaranteed by the CRC.

Our commitments and actions today have the potential to create a future that is fit for children, a world where no child is left behind.

Thank you.