Statement at the 2024 Summit of the Future on behalf of 67 members and observers of the Group of Friends of Children and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[1]

The Summit of the Future is a crucial moment for global governance and a unique opportunity to address the most pressing challenges of our time. In an increasingly interconnected world, where the ripple effects of climate change, technological disruption, and geopolitical tensions are felt within and across borders, the need for coordinated international action has never been more urgent. This Summit provides a unique platform for world leaders, experts, and stakeholders to come together to foster meaningful dialogue and cooperation.

Children represent the most vulnerable and yet the most crucial segment of our population. Decisions made today will profoundly impact their lives and shape the world they inherit. Let us capitalize on this opportunity, knowing that business as usual is not good enough. On behalf of 67 members and observers of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs, we urge the Summit and the follow-up of its outcome documents, both the Pact for the Future and its Annexes, to be inclusive of and responsive to the needs of children.

Children are bearing a disproportionate share of the consequences of today's unprecedented number of conflicts, the highest since World War II. The breakdown of family and social structures in conflict zones leaves children especially vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and recruitment by armed groups. Pervasive instability strips them of safety nets, thrusting them into situations where their physical and emotional well-being is severely compromised. At the same time, climate change is an escalating global threat to children. Rising temperatures, increasingly frequent extreme weather events, and widespread environmental degradation contribute to food and water insecurity, heightened disease transmission, and large-scale displacement. Children, whose bodies and immune systems are still developing, are particularly susceptible to climate-related illnesses such as respiratory issues, malnutrition, and conditions related to extreme heat. In addition, the rapid evolution of digital technology, while having enormous potential for the development of societies, poses further risks of exposing children to harmful content, compromising their privacy and data security, and increasing the risk of cyberbullying and online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Digital technology has evolved faster than our ability to ensure equitable access for all, simultaneously widening the digital divide. This disparity exacerbates the vulnerability of children living in remote areas and areas with limited connectivity.

These threats severely disrupt children's education and development, infringing upon their fundamental rights to education and healthcare, and their right to develop to their fullest potential as guaranteed by

[1] Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Croatia, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, 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, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay

the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The trauma they endure can have long-lasting effects, affecting their emotional well-being, health, education, and future prospects.

Despite these risks, we are not without recourse. We already have the necessary mechanisms and platforms to mitigate these dangers and safeguard the future of all children. We must, however, use these mechanisms and platforms to ensure that children are at the centre of all our efforts.

A year ago, the voices and rights of children were notably absent from the planning of the Summit of the Future. The Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs submitted written input to the zero draft of the Pact for the Future and intervened during the consultations. We have advocated for the inclusion of references to children as a distinct group of rightsholders and for increased commitment to the protection of children. Through our collective and concerted efforts, we have secured important reaffirmations of children's rights in the Pact for the Future. As we move forward with the implementation of this document, including its Annexes – the Declaration on Future Generations and the Global Digital Compact –, each reference to children must serve as our guide. Children must remain at the centre of all discussions about their future and have the opportunity to learn about their rights, be inspired to take action in their communities, and have their voices heard and amplified during consultations.

We must build a future where every child can grow up in a safe, supportive environment that nurtures their potential to the fullest. By including children's rights in the Summit of the Future, we acknowledge their integral role in global development and commit to creating a world that safeguards and promotes their well-being, dignity, and opportunities for growth. We must reinforce our commitments to multilateralism and work towards shaping a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient global order to ensure that current and future generations enjoy a world that is better prepared to face and solve emerging challenges.

Let us make sure that our commitments and actions during the Summit lay a foundation for a future where every child can enjoy the full scope of their rights as guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

****