

Statement at the 2020 High-level Political Forum on behalf of 61 countries and observersⁱ in their national capacity and as members of the Group of Friends of Children and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Mr Chair:

Our world has been irrevocably changed over the course of a few months, with untold human suffering and tragic loss of life caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis has profoundly affected our lives, as well as those of our families, our friends, our colleagues and our children.

In April, the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs joined forces with the European Union and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) to issue a joint statement on protecting the lives and rights of children. It has now been endorsed by 172 Member States and Observers.

The statement asserted that we cannot let the COVID-19 crisis become a *child rights* crisis, and that we must take action today to prevent that scenario by ensuring access to inclusive and quality education, nutrition and health care; strengthening social protection systems to provide a safety net to all children in need; and preventing and combating all forms of violence, abuse and sexual exploitation of children online and offline. This is critical for both the immediate emergency we face today, and to protect people's lives and livelihoods for the future.

Since 2015, the Group's work on behalf of children has focused on advocating for the promotion of child rights, child well-being and child participation in the planning, operationalization and monitoring of the SDGs.

The crisis we face today has demonstrated that this work is needed **more than ever**. Defeating the COVID-19 pandemic and achieving the SDGs are different sides of the same coin -- they both require a fundamental paradigm shift in the way we think and work, and stronger collaboration between nations and between generations towards a common goal: building back *better*, building back *fairer* and building back *greener* --to leave no one behind -- and where all of us reimagine a brighter future for children and work in partnership to make that future a reality.

In order to realize this vision, we recognize and celebrate that individual actions and voices *matter*. When we act as individuals, in harmony towards a common objective, we can achieve extraordinary results -- whether that is to reduce the spread of transmission today or whether that is to eliminate the spread of the virus or achieve the SDGs by 2030.

This vision also relies on listening to and engaging the people of the world as positive agents of change -- and that starts with our children.

All of us have heard from children and young people regarding their concerns over their future, but also their hopes and their solutions for making that future better. At the HLPF last year, there was unprecedented child participation in various sessions of the Forum. In this context, former ECOSOC President Inga Rhonda King declared this must be "the start of a new normal within the United Nations and our own countries...one where the voices of children and youth are consistently and systematically heard, and their ideas are taken into account as we work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals."

Of course, it is important to hear from children in global forums such as the HLPF, but we must also follow up with concrete action in our own countries in order to create the transformational change required to achieve the SDGs.

In order to do this, we must fully integrate child rights into our own local and national development plans and processes, including our Voluntary National Reviews submitted to the HLPF. We should further seek to ensure that children's perspectives are appropriately reflected in inclusive planning and decision-making processes at all levels.

We also acknowledge that children, just like us, are deeply concerned about climate change and environmental degradation, and rightly see inaction on these issues as a violation of their human rights and an existential threat to their future. We, therefore, believe that children's rights and children's voices should be explicitly addressed in our climate change and adaptation plans.

Excellencies,

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the world can come together and mobilize massive human and financial capital towards defeating a common threat. Determined action at the national and regional levels has proven to be an important complement to the collective action we have taken as both individuals and an international community to address this pandemic. This is a powerful lesson and reminder as we embark on the *Decade of Action*: if we do not achieve the SDGs, it will not be due to this being an impossible task, but rather because we chose not to.

Let us come together as one in realizing a better future for our children.

Thank you.

ⁱ Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Armenia, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Hungary, India, Ireland, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Lesotho, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uganda, United Kingdom, Uruguay, European Union.