



**CHILD-FOCUSED AGENCIES STATEMENT ON THE 2021 MINISTERIAL DECLARATION
July 22, 2021 / New York**

**UNITED NATIONS HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM MINISTERIAL DECLARATION IS A MISSED OPPORTUNITY
FOR TRANSFORMATIVE LANGUAGE ON CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION**

The United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is responsible for ensuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2021 session, more than ever, was a critical opportunity to address the reversal of hard-earned gains in sustainable development and child rights. It also was a decisive moment to emphasize cooperation and collaboration among all stakeholders at the global, regional, and national level in order to ensure that we do not have a “lost decade” for children.

We thank the co-facilitators of the Ministerial Declaration for their commitment to this process. We also thank the Member States of the Group of Friends on Children and the SDGs for their ongoing advocacy and support of children’s participation in the United Nations and other processes that allow them to exercise their fundamental right to participate.

We welcome the reaffirmation of children and youth as agents of change as stated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Furthermore, we support the critical affirmations on the need to invest in children, eliminate all forms of violence against children in all their diversity, and the inclusion of expanded language regarding “bullying, abuse and exploitation, both in person and in digital contexts” and harmful practices, including child marriage.

Despite the above, we regret that the Ministerial Declaration’s call for the participation of children and young people stops short of fully addressing this right. We are disappointed that the text lacks the strength of the previously agreed-upon language in 2018. That text emphasized: “the importance of engaging and supporting the **meaningful participation** of children, adolescents and young people, particularly the most deprived and marginalized among them, in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and of enabling their empowerment through information, knowledge and awareness of sustainable development.” (2018 Ministerial Declaration, E/HLS/2018/1 para 17.)

Children’s right to participate in decisions that affect them is enshrined in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It states that, “State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child...”¹ Around the world, children and young people in all their diversity—particularly the most marginalized—face significant challenges both in the recognition of these rights, and in facilitating and providing the adequate space to meaningfully participate. Girls often face double discrimination for being both young and female.

Notwithstanding the above, activism of children and young people is making meaningful differences in policies, laws, and national/international agendas. It is more important than ever that we work in partnership with them to listen to their priorities and co-build a world that is fit for purpose.

¹ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Children and young people are telling us that they want to be partners in decision-making; they want a seat at the table and to shape the table; they want to engage in the breadth of processes and not be included as tokens. Without meaning, participation is not valuable.

The Child-focused agencies call upon Member States to urgently advance conversations to outline what meaningful and inclusive child and youth participation looks like in United Nations led processes and their practical implementation at the national and local levels, establishing a framework to facilitate the engagement of children and youth as critical stakeholders.

We urge that processes be adapted to ensure vulnerable or marginalized children and young people, who are often left behind and face particular difficulties in participating, can be engaged and included in global or national decisions that directly impact their lives. We can achieve the realization of this key right by taking fundamental steps that lead to more inclusive and efficient participation. These include removing obstacles for participation; creating accessible, adapted, safe and specific spaces for child participation; actively supporting participation through information sharing; financing children- and youth-led groups; and by creating child-friendly versions of official policies and outcome documents.

In our capacity as leading organizations with a solid footprint at the national level, and a long-term commitment to children's rights, we stand ready to support Member States in these endeavors. We look forward to establishing a dialogue with you that will enable better outcomes for all children.