**General comment on children's rights and the environment**

**with a special focus on climate change**

**POLAND’s comments**

**Introduction:**

The consequences of climate change affect everyone, but children will be most vulnerable because they are dependent on adult caretakers who face similar challenges and because their still-developing bodies are more susceptible to the negative effects of environmental factors. For this reason, children under the age of 5 are particularly vulnerable. We can divide the effects of climate change on children into three main groups - primary, secondary and tertiary.

* **Primary impact** - Primary impact is the direct and immediate impact of climate change on children's health. It involves loss of housing or poorer access to public services due to extreme weather events (droughts, heavy rains, fires).
* **Secondary impact** - impacts of climate change that affect us indirectly or over longer period of time - through changes in air composition, food quantity and quality, spreading of tropical diseases etc.
* **Tertiary impact** - the impact of climate change on social stability, which manifests itself, among other things, in massive climate migrations, as well as an increased chance of domestic as well as international armed conflicts.

Creating strategies to address the negative impacts of climate change on children's lives must include all three of these categories, but in some countries, the main priorities may be distributed differently. As the climate change is already occurring and will be aggravated in the near future, we need to address both the causes and the effects it has already caused. Therefore, countries need to take action both on adaptation to climate change as well as to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from all sources, striving for global climate neutrality. In addition, climate action needs to be taken in the context of economic development and fight against poverty to increase resilience both at the community and country level.

**Recommendations:**

To minimize climate change impacts on human rights, in particular children’s rights we recommend:

* **Develop comprehensive mitigation strategy taking into account the child factor.** Mitigation action by all countries is necessary in order to avoid global warming beyond acceptable levels. It should eventually include all sectors and all greenhouse gases. In addition, governments and local authorities should take into account specific impacts on children, e.g. by prioritising air quality measures which have important climate and health co-benefits.
* **Develop** **a holistic adaptation strategy focusing on most vulnerable groups, including children.** Adaptation planning must respond to evolving and increasing needs of specific groups, especially the most vulnerable ones, in the face of climate change. Continued climate change will significantly degrade the quality and accessibility of public services – such as health system, education, emergency response etc., so expanding them should be a priority.
* **Climate education.** In order to raise awareness of the impacts, possible solutions, and emergency responses education programmes should include environmental and climate change knowledge. The right to education entails the right to be informed about climate change.
* **International cooperation.** Successful action on climate change and children’s rights can be facilitated by close bilateral and multilateral cooperation, including with human rights organizations like UNICEF. Transfer of funds, knowledge and capacity building will be necessary to strengthen response to common challenges.
* **A successful transition is an opportunity to create better functioning societies.** If we minimize the risk of negative consequences of climate change while developing the economy, improving health and education infrastructure, as well as closer international cooperation we have a chance to create a better future for today’s children.