

# UNICEF SPEAKING NOTES

## 34th Session of the Human Rights Council Panel discussion on Climate Change and the Rights of the Child

2 March 2017, 9 a.m. - 12 p.m., Palais des Nations, Room XX, Geneva

UNICEF speaker: Ms. Marilena Viviani, Director of the UNICEF Geneva Liaison Office, Public Partnerships Division.

- It's a pleasure to be here on behalf of UNICEF today. We **strongly welcome** the decision of the Human Rights Council in its **Resolution 32/33** to examine the critical issue of the adverse impact of Climate Change on the rights of the child, and we **thank OHCHR and the Governments of the Philippines Bangladesh, and Viet Nam** for preparing this panel and the Analytical Study.
- Climate Change undoubtedly represents one of the **most fundamental threats** facing the world's children and future generations today. Climate Change affects children's rights as delineated by the Convention of the Rights of the Child in multiple ways, from access to food and water, to their health and development, to their education and – far too often – a combination of those factors pose a threat to their very survival.
- The adverse effects of Climate Change include **increasing frequency and severity of hydro-meteorological events** affecting a rising number of vulnerable population living in disaster-prone areas, with proportionally the highest number of children as a share of their overall population. Currently 500 million children live in flood-prone areas, 160 million are exposed to severe drought, and 115 million are at high risk of tropical cyclones.
- **Drought and floods** destroy harvests, increase food insecurity and related malnutrition. Malnutrition makes children more vulnerable to severe diseases and is the underlying contributing factor of **45% of all child deaths**. The impacts of malnutrition can be lifelong – undernutrition in the first two years of life can lead to irreversible stunting, which is low height for age, which affects both physical and cognitive development, with long term economic and development implications for entire countries.
- Moreover, **Climate Change exacerbates the conditions for diseases that are currently the major causes of mortality for children under five years old: diarrhoea, malaria and pneumonia.**

- Flooding and more irregular rainfall patterns are increasing the incidence of **diarrhoeal diseases** amongst children; Rising temperatures lead to expanding **vector-borne diseases** transmission seasons and geographic areas, such as malaria and dengue fever for which children are much more likely to succumb than adults; Children are also uniquely vulnerable to air pollution, which causes pneumonia and other respiratory diseases to children. As pointed out by the UNICEF Report *“Clear the Air for Children”* launched in October 2016, around **300 million children live in areas where the air is toxic** –six times below minimum quality standard limits– due, in part, to fossil fuel use. This is a major contributing factor in the deaths of around 600,000 children under age 5 years old yearly.
- Children are affected by Climate Change more profoundly than adults due to their less developed physiology and immune systems. Childhood, especially **early childhood within the first 1000 days of life**, represents a unique period of rapid development, when children are most vulnerable to unhealthy conditions that climate change and environmental risks exacerbate.
- Based on above, UNICEF fully supports the Committee on the Rights of the Child’s recognition of climate change as **“one of the biggest threats to children’s health”** and calls on prioritizing children’s health in climate action strategies. In addition, Climate Change has an adverse impact on a whole range of **other children rights** enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, linked to increased risk of psychosocial trauma, separation, exploitation and other child protection issues associated with disasters and climate-related migration and displacement. Children from poor families are most at risk since the poorest families are settled in the areas more exposed to the adverse effects of climate change.
- **There is no time to waste** to protect the rights of hundreds of millions of children living in areas afflicted by increasing rapid and slow-onset disasters, and toxic air pollution. 2015 was already a significant year in the recognition of Climate Change impact on children and their basic rights:
  - The December 2015 COP 21 **Paris Agreement** represents a major step forward in recognising that State Parties should respect, promote and consider human rights, including the rights of children and intergenerational equity, in their action to address climate change.

- The March 2015 **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction** and the **Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030** stress the urgent need to protect children and their rights in the context of climate change.
- Now we need to **put these words into action** – and fast. Children’s rights should be at the centre of climate action -mitigation and adaptation-, by:
  - Improving energy efficiency to limit global temperature rises to 1.5 degree or lower, urgently **phasing out fossil fuels** and transitioning to sustainable energy for communities -such as providing electricity for schools and health clinics with solar power panels, equip households with fuel efficient cook stoves to reduce the need for firewood.
  - Investing in **community-resilient healthcare facilities, schools, and water and sanitation systems**, that are resistant when disasters strike.
  - Building a climate-literate generation through **climate change education** and empowering educators, parents, and children as agents of change in their own communities.
- UNICEF stands ready to advise and support governments and communities to implement the action required.
- In line with the **September 2016 CRC Committee Day of General Discussion**, UNICEF recommends to continue assessing how the environment negatively affects children’s rights, with a specific focus on children in vulnerable situations, and how children of different ages, gender and social backgrounds can participate in decisions and actions. It is important to **ensure that children’s views and specific needs are sought, heard and acted upon**. Children’s views should be included in key processes notably in the international climate talks, and in the national policies and actions.
- We also recommend to **further clarify the action required** by Governments, the business sector, and other key stakeholders in relation to a safe, clean and sustainable environment; and **integrate climate change in CRC reporting**.
- UNICEF strongly welcomes the Committee’s continuing focus in this area and the **Analytical Study** to be presented at the HRC 35<sup>th</sup> Session, as a key contribution to put children’s rights at the heart of climate action.

Thank you for your attention.