Speech for the launch of GC 26, 18 September 2023

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It’s a big day today, for the Committee on the Rights of the Child as we launch General Comment 26 on Children’s Rights and the Environment, with a special focus on climate change. In delivering this authoritative guidance to states, we act on the impetus of children’s own voices. It was their urging, at our Day of General Discussion in 2016, in our many conversations with children in our meetings with them at the Committee, through the Sacchi case that 16 children brought to the Committee, that brought us to this point. And then we were spurred on by the enormous wave of participation of almost 17 000 children in the consultations on the General Comment. We have been galvanized by their clear message: Do something! We have been blown away by their courage in standing up as human rights defenders, not just for their own rights – but for the rights of all of us. To preserve the environment for future generations who have not yet been born – it’s a responsibility of all of us, but children have taken the burden on their shoulders.

So, we have done something. We have set out clearly in writing how children’s rights are affected by environmental degradation and climate change, and how they must be allowed to exercise their rights in offering their contribution to debates about it. We have said clearly that children have a right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and that this right is embedded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child that has already been ratified by 196 states. My colleagues will say more about the content.

We dedicate General Comment 26 to all the children of the world, so that they – and even future generations – may enjoy the oceans and the rivers, the mountains and fjords, clean air, fresh water, happy biospheres, and the animal world. To the States parties to the Convention we want to say: Let’s get together in a spirit of true international cooperation – because we are all connected in the future that we face. Generations connected with generations, States with other states. We share skies and rivers and seas, we must find shared solutions to the threats that environmental degradation pose to children’s rights.

You will not hear too much from committee members today: The committee has chosen to let you hear the main messages from children themselves:

Maya-Natuk! - back to you.