

**UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE
RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

DAY OF GENERAL DISCUSSION (DGD) 2018

*Protecting and Empowering
Children as Human Rights Defenders*

Report



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1. Introduction

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee)¹ dedicated its 2018 Day of General Discussion (DGD) to the topic “*Protecting and Empowering Children as Human Rights Defenders*”, to foster a deeper understanding of the content and implications of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention)² with regard to child human rights defenders.³

On 28 September 2018, more than 400 participants, including approximately 60 children, attended the DGD at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. Participants included NGOs, State representatives, students, academics, representatives of United Nations agencies and United Nations human rights mechanisms. In addition, more than 800 participants from across 66 countries followed the DGD through the United Nations’ webcasting service, and there was a significant following of the 2018 DGD via social media.

The 2018 DGD was the first global discussion focusing on children as human rights defenders and for the first time children played a central role in the planning, implementation and follow-up to an event of the Committee. Children took active part during the day, participating as speakers, moderators and audience, alongside adults.

The main goal of the DGD was to increase public awareness and understanding on:

1. The definition of child human rights defenders, their role and activities;
2. The situation, experiences and views of child human rights defenders;
3. The gaps in international, regional and national human rights law with regard to the protection and empowerment of child human rights defenders;
4. States’ obligations under international law in the protection and empowerment of child human rights defenders; and
5. Adults’ roles and responsibilities related to the protection and empowerment of child human rights defenders.

The DGD had the following objectives:

1. Collect children’s views about their experiences as human rights defenders;
2. Assess legislation, jurisprudence, policies and relevant measures aimed to protect and/or empower child human rights defenders, by providing examples of challenges and good practices, including children’s perspectives;
3. Clarify States’ obligations, under the Convention, applicable to child human rights defenders, as well as other relevant standards on human rights defenders;
4. Identify key elements for an effective implementation of a child rights approach to the situation of children who are, or want to become, human rights defenders, including specific recommendations for duty bearers that can inform the Committee’s recommendations to States.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, the Committee refers to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

² Unless otherwise indicated, the Convention refers to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

³ All relevant 2018 DGD documents, including webcast, presentations and written submissions, are available on the Committee’s webpage: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/Discussion2018.aspx>

2. Contextualizing children as human rights defenders

The year 2018 marked the 20th Anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (the Declaration)⁴, as well as the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁵ The DGD contributed to this landmark year by highlighting the importance of promoting respect and support for the activities of human rights defenders of all ages.

The concept of child human rights defenders has its ground in article 1 of the Convention,⁶ which defines a 'child' as a person under the age of 18 years. Article 1 of the Declaration on human rights defenders states that “Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”. A child human rights defender is a human rights defender who is under the age of 18 years.

There is no minimum age to act for the protection, promotion and fulfilment of human rights. The actions of human rights defender are wide-ranging and cross-cutting, and include promoting the realization of human rights; collecting and disseminating information on human rights violations; supporting victims; contributing to the implementation of human rights treaties; and supporting better governance and accountability.

Children who take actions to promote, protect and fulfil their own human rights, or the human rights of their peers or of others, including adults, are human rights defenders, even if they do not see themselves as such, or are not considered and called as such by others.

2.1 Protection of child human rights defenders

The Convention recognizes that children are entitled to a heightened duty of care because of their special status as children, which requires specific measures that take into account their development level and evolving capacities. States parties are bound to apply specific safeguards to ensure that children are not harmed, under article 6 on the right to life, survival and development and under article 19 on freedom from violence. This includes not being subjected to human rights violations because of their actions as human rights defenders, or their interest and initiatives towards becoming one.

According to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mr. Forst, “a good practice in protecting human rights defenders is a practice that contributes to the full respect of their human rights and strengthens their security, including by mitigating the risks they face, addressing threats and building support for their work”.⁷ States parties should take specific and appropriate measures to protect children human rights defenders. Protection systems should always aim at enabling children to be active in a safe and secure environment.

⁴ [United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#)

⁵ [Universal Declaration on Human Rights](#)

⁶ [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

⁷ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders to the 31st session of the Human Rights Council, [A/HRC/31/55](#) of 1 February 2016.

2.2 Empowerment of child human rights defenders

The Convention establishes that States parties have the obligation to take specific measures for the development of children according to their evolving capacities (art. 5), abilities (art. 23) and best interests (art. 3), without discrimination (art. 2). Children should learn about human rights through education (arts. 28 and 29), and be able to exercise their rights to express their views and be heard (article 12), freedom of expression (art. 13), freedom of thought and conscience (art. 14), freedom of association and peaceful assembly (art. 15), and access to information (art. 17). Children’s ability to engage in political and public affairs depends largely on the extent to which their rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

2.3 A Child Rights Approach

A child rights approach recognizes children as holders of human rights and subjects of their own rights, as opposed to recipients of concern, good will or charity. According to this approach all the measures concerning children should comply with the rights set out in the Convention and consider at all times the general principles of non-discrimination (art. 2), best interests (art. 3), right to life, survival and development (art. 6), and right to be heard (art. 12).

As articulated in the Convention, children are entitled to special protection, due to their special and dependent status, and evolving capacities. States and other duty bearers have the obligation to take specific measures to protect and empower children who are or wish to become child human rights defenders, in a way that does not limit their rights and freedoms.

The DGD Global Consultation⁸ revealed that while most child participants see themselves as human rights defenders, many adults do not consider them as such, either because they want to protect them, do not believe in their capacities or do not take them seriously. A child rights approach requires that all actors involved - State authorities, adults, children and all other stakeholders – protect, respect and fulfil the rights of children when deciding on measures that affect them.

2.4 The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (the Declaration), the result of a collective effort by States and civil society, emphasizes that any person or group of persons working to promote human rights can be considered a defender. Defenders can be of any age and gender, from any part of the world and from all socio-economic backgrounds. They can work through professional or non-professional activities and can act to address any human right on behalf of individuals or groups, be it civil, political, economic, social or cultural rights (art. 18).⁹

The Declaration outlines specific duties of States parties, including human rights education (art. 15) and the protection of everyone against any violence, threats, retaliation, adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his, her or their legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the Declaration (art. 12). It includes the

⁸ The report of the DGD Global Consultation, “The Views, Perspectives and Recommendations of Children across the World”, is available at: https://www.childrightsconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DGD-REPORT_WEB_en_def_web.pdf

⁹ See also [OHCHR definition of human rights defenders](#)

obligation to adopt legislative, administrative and any other necessary steps to implement the Declaration (arts. 2.2 and 3).

3. Child participation

The Committee was clear from the outset that the participation of children was to be at the core of the 2018 DGD. With the support of Child Rights Connect, and in collaboration with the Centre for Children’s Rights at Queens University Belfast, children played a central and leading role throughout each stage of the 2018 DGD process. The Committee actively engaged with child human rights defenders across the world in several different ways and at different moments.

3.1 The Children’s Advisory Team

In November 2017, Child Rights Connect launched a global call for children to apply to become Child Advisors on a DGD Children’s Advisory Team. Twenty-one children from nineteen countries in five continents were selected, taking into consideration factors such as age, gender, language, region and socio-economic background, to ensure an inclusive Team.¹⁰ Each application included a supporting organisation member or partner of Child Rights Connect.

The Children’s Advisory Team was formed in February 2018 and received support to participate in each step of the planning, implementation and follow-up of the 2018 DGD. The Child Advisors provided concrete suggestions to the DGD programme to make it more interactive and involve child speakers and child moderators, instead of following the traditional model of a high-level panel. The Child Advisors informed the Committee’s “Working methods for the participation of children in Days of General Discussion”,¹¹ designed the logo and provided materials for the exhibition at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. In addition, the Child Advisors contributed to, and edited, child-friendly materials, including a child-friendly proposal, the Concept Note and the Global Children’s Consultation report.

To facilitate communication within such a diverse team, three language groups were created: English, French and Spanish; and a Child Advisor speaking Arabic participated with the assistance of an interpreter. Child Rights Connect used an online communications platform ‘Basecamp’ and regular online calls to connect with the Child Advisors in preparation of the 2018 DGD. Basecamp was used to host a ‘Question and Answer’ session between the Child Advisors and the Committee’s DGD Coordinators, Ms. Mikiko Otani and Mr. Luis Pedernera. Child Rights Connect facilitated a DGD preparatory workshop in Geneva in March 2018, with the in-person participation of five Child Advisors and the remote participation of the remaining Team.

3.2 A Global Children’s Consultation

The Child Advisors, together with Child Rights Connect members and partners, helped facilitate the DGD Global Children’s Consultation at the national level and empowered their

¹⁰ The Team began with 20 members, with an additional Child Advisor joining later.

¹¹ Working methods for the participation of children in the days of general discussion of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, [CRC/C/155](#)

peers to engage in this exercise. To support the Consultation, a methodology pack and online survey were developed and disseminated by Queens University Belfast and Child Rights Connect.

The Consultation, which included the participation of adults and children, collected experiences views and recommendations from children on the recognition, empowerment and protection of child human rights defenders; raising awareness and understanding on the topic of child human rights defenders and supporting/advancing the overall protection and promotion of human rights.

DGD hubs were created at the local, national and regional levels to promote debate on the topic of the DGD; these took place before and during the DGD, so that discussions were not limited to a single event in Geneva. Both adults and children participated in five DGD hubs which took place across all regions, and Child Rights Connect developed specific DGD hubs guidelines to support the discussions.¹²

More than 2,695 children from across 53 countries, between the ages of five and 18 years, participated in the Consultation and the findings were presented in a child-friendly publication during the DGD, which is available online.¹³

3.3 Child participation during the DGD (28 September 2018)

As envisaged by the Committee, children actively participated in the discussions and shared their views throughout the Day. Children played a central role participating as speakers in the plenary and the working groups, moderating dialogues, and creating an interactive dynamic with the audience. A Child Advisor of the DGD Children’s Advisory Team acted as a moderator for each dialogue alongside a Committee member. Six Child Advisors acted as panellists during the opening and closing plenary sessions of the DGD. To make the plenary sessions more interactive, several Child Advisors led icebreaker activities and conducted an online poll to assess participants’ knowledge on child human rights defenders.

On the day prior to the DGD, Child Rights Connect facilitated a children’s briefing, open to all child participants to the 2018 DGD. During the briefing, 45 children got to know one another, and met Committee members and other adult speakers, which helped them better prepare for the DGD. The children helped finalize a DGD “Participation Code of Conduct for Children and Adults”, and were informed of the Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedure to ensure their safety, wellbeing and right to privacy. As part of this policy, during the DGD and related activities, children were referred to only by their first names to ensure their right to privacy and to prevent any risks to their safety.

3.4 Child participation in DGD follow-up and evaluation

Child Rights Connect organized a post-DGD debriefing on 29 September with the aim to obtain feedback on the Day from the child participants, and to exchange and plan for follow-up activities. Many children expressed appreciation for the diversity and inspirational presentations of speakers, in particular the child speakers, and the fact that the DGD was interactive and gave children an opportunity to meet and engage with the speakers, other

¹² [DGD Hubs Guidelines](#)

¹³ [The Views, Perspectives and Recommendations of Children across the World](#)

participants and members of the Committee. The Committee asked children to complete an evaluation form to collect their views on how their participation was supported during the DGD and children highlighted “the feeling that adults were listening to us” and “that everyone’s opinions were valued”, as some of their favourite elements of the day.

Regarding child participation and the need to make the DGD more child-friendly, children suggested a lighter programme, a welcome desk for children, and to prepare adult speakers and participants to engage with children in a child-friendly manner. They emphasized the importance of ensuring follow-up, including through the Committee’s continued engagement with children and through support to networks of child human rights defenders.

Since October 2018, the Child Advisors have been engaging in follow-up activities to the DGD, and with the support of Child Rights Connect, the Children’s Advisory Team continues to operate.

4. Plenary sessions and working groups

The DGD opened with a plenary session, followed by discussions in three working groups to examine the roles of State actors, non-State actors and online space in relation to child human rights defender. Each working group held several short dialogues between adults and children on specific topics, followed by open discussions on the protection and empowerment of child human rights defenders at local, national and international levels. The day ended with a concluding plenary session to share key learnings and recommendations.

4.1 The opening plenary session

In her opening remarks, the Committee’s Chair, Ms. Renate Winter highlighted the need to look at the situation of child human rights defenders with a two-fold perspective: empowerment and protection. She also expressed her concern over the tendency to no longer regard human rights as a priority and to oppose, instead of support, human rights defenders.

Ms. Kate Gilmore, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, expressed her gratitude to all children and young people participating in the DGD. “Today, we will talk with you, about you. We will listen to you and want to encourage you in your leadership roles as child human rights defenders”. She said that the presence of children at the United Nations should not be a celebration, it should be normal, routine, regular and familiar.

“Being young is a competence”, Ms. Gilmore continued, and questioned why older people do not give more weight to children’s experience and knowledge. She urged for a change in power relations between adults and children and emphasized the need for there to be more respect for children and that they be actively listened to by adults.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mr. Michel Forst, remarked that the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders is “one of the best kept secrets in the world”. Although the Declaration is an important tool, many people, adults and children alike, are not aware of its existence and the protection it offers. Mr. Forst noted that it is often forgotten that children are human rights holders, as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and that we have to ensure that States develop national protection mechanisms for human rights defenders which include children.

Mr. Abraham Keita, a young human rights defender from Liberia and winner of the International Children’s Peace Prize in 2015, highlighted the need for effective protection and

empowerment of child human rights defenders. Keita recalled the 20th Anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and reminded the audience that the past 20 years have also brought atrocities with them: “Malala was shot, Maria from Brazil was killed, others were put in prisons in Egypt and elsewhere; these are the situations that we must change”, he stressed. Mr. Keita explained that based on his experience, national legislation can make an important difference and provide the primary tool for the effective protection of child human rights defenders.

In the second plenary session, the moderator Ms. Beatrice Schulter of Child Rights Connect stated that the Committee’s decision to focus this DGD on child human rights defenders was ground-breaking because it challenged the prevailing perception that children are merely passive objects of protection rather than active holders of human rights.

With regard to the recognition of children as human rights defenders, Ms. Mikiko Otani, member of the Committee and co-coordinator of the DGD, highlighted that “children were already acting as human rights defenders, it was just that adults did not pay attention to their activities, their experiences, their roles, contributions, voices, needs, and challenges”. Ms. Otani remarked the transformative power of children and acknowledged that this DGD would be the beginning of a global movement of child human rights defenders and would “make its mark in the history of children’s rights”.

The session concluded with remarks from three members of the Children’s Advisory Team. Akanksha, a 15-year-old child human rights defender from Canada, spoke of the ability of every child to promote children’s human rights, as well the role of social media in empowering child human rights defenders. Kurt, a 16-year-old child human rights defender from Argentina, drew attention to the lack of equality of children around the world, particularly in crisis areas, and stated that: “We, the youth, are not the future; we are the present. What we are looking for is [to be] listened to.” Mazidath, a 17-year-old child human rights defender from Benin, highlighted the role of schools in protecting and supporting child human rights defenders, and the need for schools to establish mechanisms that allow students to participate in the activities of institutions and organizations that work on children’s rights.

4.2 Working group 1 – Child human rights defenders and the online space

Moderators morning session (4.2.1 to 4.2.3): Mr. Clarence Nelson, member of the Committee; Christina, 16-year-old child human rights defender from the United States of America and member of the Children’s Advisory Team

Moderators afternoon session (4.2.4 to 4.2.6): Mr. Gehad Madi, member of the Committee; Aishwayra, 17-year-old child human rights defender from India and member of the Children’s Advisory Team

4.2.1 Civil society space for child human rights defenders

Speakers: Ms. Jean McDonald, Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations in Geneva; Amy, 17-year-old child human rights defender from Canada

Ms. Jean McDonald presented examples from Ireland, where children and young people are increasingly using online spaces to connect with one another. Ms. McDonald referred to instances of social change in Ireland, whereby children and young people have used online

spaces to raise their voices and impact outcomes on specific political issues, such as a referendum on constitutional change and a referendum on marriage equality.

Amy referred to an example where social media platforms were used by youth across Canada to welcome newcomers in their schools. Amy noted that adults may listen to children but it's rare for children's opinions to be taken into account and influence policies as children "are still not viewed at the same level as adults".

Ms. McDonald highlighted structural changes in Ireland including the establishment of a Ministry for Children and Youth Affairs which has already launched several national strategies to create enabling environments for children and young people to have their perspectives heard, and address issues that go beyond what may have been traditionally classified as "child" or "youth" relevant. She also talked about Ireland's National Strategy on "Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015-2020" and reflected on how Member States of the United Nations can benefit from multilateralism and learning from one another's experiences including from the recommendations put forward by the Committee.

Amy said that "technology is almost part of our DNA now [...] so it's impossible to try and separate it out." She added that technology is influencing children and youth's engagement in politics, and online platforms are now an integral part of social and political processes. Online platforms were described as a great way for child human rights defenders to have their voices heard. Amy gave the example of an opportunity she had to connect with youth across Canada in one giant online conference, which is very rare due the vast extension of the country. Ms. McDonald recognized that technology breaks down barriers and allows for the exchange of views around diverse issues.

Effective collaboration between children and adults is necessary, as well as the creation of spaces for meaningful exchange. It was suggested that intergenerational dialogue could be enhanced if older generations made more regular use of social media channels.

Technology and social media, however, can be a double-edged sword, as they can also present a potential threat for child human rights defenders. Amy recognized that quite often children are online targets and can be bombarded with negative comments, including when they are advocating for certain issues that are not supported by the government. Amy suggested that children can better protect themselves online by being careful about what they share. Better education about, and access to safer online channels where children are exposed to less risk, are essential. Importantly, what needs to be countered is not the use of social media, since it can be an important tool for child human rights defenders, but how governments can restrict its use.

In relation to civil society space and the rights of human rights defenders, such as freedom of expression, it was highlighted that resolutions adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council can indeed advance the effective implementation of these rights, but at the same time such multilateral processes can often be lengthy. This was seen as a huge challenge in tackling issues such as restrictions on the use of social media.

4.2.2 Empowerment through digital media

Speakers: Ms. Regina Jentsdottir, Head of the Children's Rights Division, Council of Europe; Melissa, 17-year-old child human rights defenders from Brazil

The digital environment is a space where we can listen to the voices of children; this is why the empowerment of children in the digital environment is particularly important for child

human rights defenders, noted Ms. Jensdottir. She referred to the Council of Europe’s “Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment”,¹⁴ and how these can be used as a tool to empower children, for example, in meetings with policy-makers about children’s rights to access information, education, freedom of assembly, privacy and data protection issues, safety and remedies available to children.

Melissa noted that digital media has made it possible for her to communicate and spread information throughout her country, Brazil. In small groups, and as part of a network, children and young people gather in their communities and decide what issues need to be addressed in public policy-making, for example: the need to build a new hospital or to employ more teachers. Once the issues are agreed, the network raises these with local municipalities and supportive politicians. Melissa noted that this network is important in informing political leaders by sharing issues and presenting new perspectives to them. Regarding the empowerment and protection of children, the network wants children “to feel welcomed to speak, and to feel safe to speak; the network’s focus is always on teaching and training, so everyone can become a leader or a human rights defender.” Melissa concluded that social media is a very important tool that can be instrumental to spread and share knowledge.

The dialogue highlighted that an important element of online campaigning, and use of social media, is for children to be informed and to understand their human rights, and the internet has created an important space for this to take place.

A question was raised on extremist movements and what can be done to support better online safety of children in more vulnerable situations. “Many children face difficulties when acting as human rights defenders or while promoting human rights, but it has become easier because of social media, because this tool allows child human rights defenders to connect with each other and be updated on relevant issues”, stated Akanksha. Through social media, Akanksha learned about recurrent human rights violations; how important it was for children to defend their rights; and how she could get involved in protecting and promoting these rights. She perceives social media as an effective tool and a powerful platform for the promotion of children’s rights and for advocating for their views on a variety of issues affecting children around the world.

4.2.3 Child-led initiatives & protection online

Speakers: Tomomasa, former youth representative of Study Group on Social Media,¹⁵ Japan; Konstantinos, 16-year-old child human rights defender from Greece

Tomomasa told that empowering children to develop their own measures and strategies against issues such as internet addiction and online bullying, is more effective than rules created and imposed by adults. Through a peer-to-peer and a participatory approach, Tomomasa’s organization organizes “Smartphone Summits” with children from 10 to 18 years of age to address digital media issues. With the cooperation of mobile phone companies, the police and members of school education boards, children are empowered to discuss and define measures for social media use. They are informed about online risks, and through active participation, children are empowered to speak up and make decisions themselves on how to use the Internet

¹⁴ Council of Europe, [Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment](#) (2018)

¹⁵ The Study Group on Social Media was formed in 2013 by university students to address online issues affecting children such as sexual abuse and violence online or through the internet.

without having their freedoms restricted. According to Tomomasa, States should provide opportunities for children to think about issues relating to the Internet, including through educational programs on Internet use.

“Constructive criticism and dialogue are the foundation of democracy but, online, these are undermined by hate speech” stated Konstantinos. He highlighted that children often use fake names, as they are afraid to freely express their opinions for fear of being criticized by adults or even by their peers. Konstantinos founded “Teens4Greece”¹⁶ which provides Greek children with a space where they can be empowered to freely express their opinions and to propose solutions for issues concerning their country. It is a forum safe from negative criticism, inappropriate words or insults, and promotes a positive and constructive dialogue. He explained that the forum establishes rules so that participants can express themselves freely, for example, by removing harmful comments or banning individuals. The website includes a mentor campaign to help empower and inspire children and young people.

Konstantinos highlighted that there are various online tools that allow children to set up new platforms, and that it is necessary to check laws on personal data and internet security, age limits and consent. From the discussions, it appeared that children are not aware of the possibility of creating alternative online communication platforms.

4.2.4 Empowerment and protection of child human rights defenders and victims of sexual exploitation

Speakers: Ms. Najat Maala M’jid, paediatrician and child rights expert; Himanshu, 15-year-old child human rights defender from India

Ms. Maala M’jid introduced Himanshu as a good, strong example of a boy living in a remote, rural and conservative area in India, where many socio-economic problems and conservative norms exist, and where tourism is growing because of its historical importance.

Himanshu explained how his club, made up of approximately 40 children, started its activities to deal with online protection issues for children such as speaking to strangers on the internet, sending pictures, risks of grooming and sexual exploitation, and spending time on the internet rather than studying. He noted that internet can be used for the “right reasons” but it can also be very harmful and encouraged children to focus on their studies as a strong foundation for their future, rather than earn money from tourism.

Himanshu added that through the club’s activities, children reported faulty health care facilities to relevant authorities, which were then improved; children successfully ensured the building of the first playground in his hometown; and police now record and report incidents of child abuse in his hometown, which is a tourist location. The club empowers children to approach adults and government authorities, and these in return have demonstrated to respect children’s views and suggestions. He highlighted that through child-led initiatives, children have come together to mobilise community leaders and local authorities on issues of sexual exploitation in tourism.

Ms. Maala M’jid asked about the challenges faced when raising issues of sexual violence and how they overcome them. Himanshu said that when the club was created, in 2015, it was a difficult journey as no one appreciated what the children were doing and told

¹⁶ [Teens4Greece](#)

them to focus on studying. But, when the club reached around 25 members, and these approached adults and authorities collectively, they were in fact listened to.

Mr. Madi underscored the importance of the collective effort of children to provide information to and change the mind of authorities.

4.2.5 Indigenous child human rights defenders

Speakers: Mr. Manuel Lopez, Indigenous Fellow, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); Theland, 15-year-old child human rights defender from Canada

Theland said that social media allows indigenous people to communicate with each other and discuss relevant topics. Online spaces are important because “native” language applications are available, which allow indigenous children to learn and communicate in their own language. For him, social media can provide an important voice for the indigenous community. Theland stressed that this is very important for their identity. Nevertheless, access to online participation spaces remains a great challenge, particularly for indigenous children with disabilities, and for children living in rural areas where access to the internet remains extremely challenging and leads to the lack of child and youth participation.

Theland added that the educational system does not empower indigenous child human rights defenders because indigenous children, indigenous history and reality are not represented in educational curricula; children’s rights are taught in a very general way and there is no specific focus to the rights that are relevant for indigenous children.

Mr. Lopez commented that in Mexico, indigenous people face discrimination, lack of access to education, particularly higher education, and have to deal with issues involving drug cartels, land ownership and historical poverty. There are ongoing problems of violence and activists risking their lives, as in the case of indigenous students, human rights defenders, who were killed in a little town after protesting against the government. Mr. Lopez said that indigenous communities, especially in rural and remote areas, have difficulties with internet connectivity and availability of computers and other devices. Indigenous children and young people residing in urban areas are more engaged in social media and often use it to promote cultural events and traditional songs.

4.2.6 Child human rights defenders with disabilities

Speakers: Ms. Catalina Devandas Aguillar, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities; Magdalena, 12-year-old child human rights defender from Moldova; James, 15-year old-child human rights defender from Scotland

Magdalena explained that in Moldova children with disabilities increasingly benefit from inclusive education, and highlighted that for child human rights defenders with disabilities “the online space is a really good way to promote and fight for their rights.” Magdalena recognized that all children have the right to associate, and through the creation of online groups, children can come together. Child human rights defenders with disabilities can share their stories and understand the difficulties they face. She suggested having a mobile phone application to help answer questions, such as “what to do if you are insulted in a public space?”. Billboards and videos on public transportation could also help promote the rights of children with disabilities, the difficulties they face and how others can help them defend human rights.

James stated that anyone, children, adults, any person with a disability, can easily be bullied online, and there is need for safeguards, such as privacy settings on social media profiles. But, children with disabilities may not know how to set up social media profiles and access safety settings, which are often hard to find. James said that along with accessible online spaces, it is important for schools to raise children's awareness on the different types of disabilities.

The discussions highlighted that the internet enables child human rights defenders with disabilities to convey messages and share views within their own countries and beyond, and that technology is an important tool to increase their access to information and channels of communication. Participants talked about peer support groups and online self-advocacy groups. They also called for increased accessibility to online spaces in everyday life, and not only in school settings.

Ms. Aguillar underlined the importance of making the United Nations recommendations made to States accessible to all children, including children with disabilities.

4.2.7 Summary analysis: child human rights defenders and the online space

The digital environment has become an integral part of the activities, the protection and the empowerment of child human rights defenders, and online and offline activities and realities can no longer be addressed separately.

Online spaces provide opportunities for children to connect with other children, and to impact political issues, such as political referendums. Participants noted that while children may be able to express their views, it is rare that these views are taken into consideration. A recommendation and call from child participants was for there to be an online intergenerational dialogue, recognizing that children want to engage with adults on human rights issues, using spaces where they can exercise their right to freedom of expression.

As social media can be a potential threat for child human rights defenders, who can be harassed, bullied or victimized for the opinions expressed or the work they do, participants emphasised the need for better education for children to protect themselves and to access safer online channels. They stressed that governments should not restrict online spaces for civil society nor children's access to social media. It was noted that UN processes and resolutions can help protect civil society spaces and counter governments' restrictions, and that multilateralism allows States to learn from each other's experiences and the Committee's recommendations.

Through digital media child human rights defenders can communicate, share information on public policy issues and coordinate advocacy actions towards government authorities. Social media can help inform and educate children on their human rights, and training is important to make them feel welcome and safe on online spaces. Social media allows children in vulnerable situations to connect with other children in similar situations, to learn about what is happening in the world around them, and empowers them to take measures to protect their human rights. It was noted that States are in need of further information on how to effectively respect children's rights on the online space, such as the existing guidelines provided by the Council of Europe.

The discussion on child-led initiatives for protection online concluded that protection measures are more effective if children are actively involved in their development, and can decide which measures are best to be applied. As children learn about risks related to social

media use, they are empowered and can make their own decisions without feeling restricted. Parents, teachers, law enforcement officials and information and communication technologies businesses have a role to play in training and supporting children to address digital media issues, including inappropriate words or insults, negative criticism, harassment or online violence. Safeguards to avoid online risks for child human rights defenders can include the creation of alternative child-friendly online platforms with specific safeguards and accessibility. Protection needs to be strengthened across existing platforms, while creating new child-friendly online platforms.

Child-led initiatives have demonstrated that children can identify and address human rights issues, such as access to health, right to play, protection from violence, including sexual violence in the context of tourism, and that when they do so collectively, government authorities, service providers and law enforcement agencies pay more attention to their concerns and take the appropriate measures to address them.

Indigenous children human rights defenders face their own set of challenges. Within school systems indigenous children are more than often not empowered to enact their rights, as indigenous history and reality are not included in educational curricula. As many indigenous children live in remote or rural areas where internet access is reduced, they have limited access to information and to connect with one another. Nevertheless, internet and online access to resources is providing indigenous children with opportunities to learn their own languages, know about the human rights issues that affect them, connect with one another and strengthen their identity and empower them to speak for themselves.

The internet and online resources open a range of possibilities for children with disabilities to learn about their human rights, to communicate with one another and to discuss how they can address issues that concern them. Child human rights defenders with disabilities see technology as an important tool to increase their access to information and to new channels of communication.

Recommendations of United Nations human rights mechanism need to be made accessible to child human rights defenders, so that they can be empowered with information and resources.

[4.3 Working group 2- State actors and child human rights defenders](#)

Moderators morning session (4.3.1 to 4.3.3): Ms. Amal Aldoseri, member of the Committee; Hannah, 12-year-old child human rights defender from Scotland and member of the Children's Advisory Team

Moderators afternoon session (4.3.4 to 4.3.5): Mr. Jorge Cardona, member of the Committee; Nayeli, 16-year-old child human rights defender from Ecuador and member of the Children's Advisory Team

[4.3.1 National protection measures for child human rights defenders](#)

Speakers: Mr. Vincent Ploton, International Service for Human Rights; Mr. Abraham M. Keita, young human rights defender from Liberia

The discussion identified the main obstacles child human rights defenders face in carrying out their human rights work, which include, on the one hand, the existence of laws restricting the activities of human rights defenders, and, on the other hand, the lack of effective

implementation of the laws that protect them. Often national legislation is in place, but in practice, crackdown on civil society space takes place. Cooperation between civil society and government largely depends on the country specific context, where in some situations, such dialogue is extremely difficult or just inexistent.

The speakers therefore stressed the importance of legislation that recognizes the particular situation of children and child human rights defenders. Mr. Ploton referred to a joint statement¹⁷ made by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and a group of members of the United Nations Treaty Bodies, which encouraged Member States to develop and adopt laws and policies that specifically guarantee the protection of human rights defenders, with particular reference to the situation and protection needs of, inter alia, child human rights defenders.

In Guinea, a draft law on the protection of human rights defenders is currently being discussed. The draft law includes specific provisions on child human rights defenders, in line with previous recommendations of the Committee. If adopted, this law would make Guinea the fourth country in Africa to have a national law on human rights defenders in force, and the first country in the world to have a law explicitly recognizing the particular situation of child human rights defenders. The discussion also highlighted the need for specific measures to protect child human rights defenders with disabilities; Mr. Ploton noted that there is a law in Mali with a specific provision for persons with disabilities, and that the draft law in Guinea also includes protection measures for this specific group.

Children have an important role in advocating for such legislation. In Liberia, for example, Mr. Keita described how children pushed for the adoption of legislation on children's rights, and stated that each country needs national legislation that clearly spells out the rights of children. He noted that national laws should be a means to protect children who report violations or advocate for human rights. In this regard, Mr. Keita said that the Committee needs to put more pressure on governments to protect child human rights defenders.

Furthermore, the participation of child human rights defenders in human rights mechanisms at the international level should go beyond the work of the Committee to other United Nations human rights mechanisms, such as the United Nations Human Rights Committee which makes the most recommendations to States on issues specific to human rights defenders. The Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on a Communications Procedure¹⁸ is also an important tool for children to take cases of human rights violations to the Committee to seek remedy.

4.3.2 Participation in public affairs/freedom of assembly and association

Speakers: Mr. Olivier de Frouville, United Nations Human Rights Committee; Luis, 16-year-old child human rights defender from Peru; Eoyel, 15-year-old child human rights defender from Ethiopia

¹⁷ [20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders: Joint statement by a group of Chairs, Vice-Chairs and members of the United Nations human rights Treaty Bodies and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders](#), 1 June 2018.

¹⁸ [Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure](#)

Several speakers stressed that all children, without discrimination, should be able to participate in all spaces, including in public affairs, and be ensured a “horizontal type” of collaboration with all relevant stakeholders. When children are given platforms to express their opinions, it empowers them as it gives them a chance to be heard, stated Akanksha, a 15-year-old child human rights defender from Canada. “We need to give children places where they can speak, be listened to, and have their views respected,” said Akanksha, “because it is their voice that is the voice of the future”.

In practice, the right of a child to participate in public affairs remains difficult to fulfill because “the doors are closed simply by the fact of being children”, stated Luis, who has been a child human rights defender since he was 10 years of age. Many of the submissions to the DGD, including by children, reported the lack of respect for children’s right to speak out and this was considered one of the most significant barriers to their actions as human rights defenders. Due to their status as children, they rely on their duty bearers to provide a protective and conducive environment to develop their skills towards adulthood. Whenever adults portray a negative image of children and a patronizing attitude disregarding their views, it becomes particularly challenging for children to become - or perform their activities as - human rights defenders. Luis also highlighted the particular difficulties indigenous children face, particularly girls and transgender and homosexual children in effectively enjoying their human right to freedom of assembly.

Mr. de Frouville noted that the right to freedom of assembly and association, as recognized in both the Convention and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,¹⁹ is less evident in public affairs, because the general conception of these freedoms is related to the right to vote. However, freedoms of assembly and association are much broader in scope: they include all deliberations concerning public affairs, as well as participation in consultative and decision-making assemblies.

4.3.3 Child human rights defenders in armed conflict & humanitarian situations

Speakers: Ms. Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons; Sandra Camila, 16-year-old child human rights defender from Colombia; Haya, 15-year-old child human rights defender from Syria.

Sandra Camilla emphasized that child human rights defenders in armed conflict and humanitarian situations face dangers that often go unreported. They can be killed for standing up for their human rights, as they can be seen as a threat when they speak up. Girl human rights defenders are particularly vulnerable to intimidation or reprisals. In such contexts, the well-being of child human rights defenders is not taken into account, and oftentimes their resilience, voice and ability to act is undermined.

The discussion also identified various barriers faced by child human rights defenders who are living in, or have been affected by, situations of armed conflict. Haya explained that in the refugee camp where she lives, child human rights defenders are not recognized as human rights defenders, and that this lack of recognition limits their activities and their impact as child human rights defenders. A general lack of awareness of international human rights law and United Nations human rights reporting mechanisms also limits children’s ability to defend their human rights. Furthermore, the lack of access to information, education and means of

¹⁹ [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#)

communication remain barriers for child human rights defenders, in particular for those with disabilities.

Sandra Camilla explained how a training conducted by Plan International helped empower child human rights defenders to participate in her community, and to call for government investment in public spaces for child human rights defenders. She emphasized that raising awareness and promoting human rights needs to be made a priority, and that “we cannot be fearful of speaking up.” She also told the story of a girl human rights defender whose father was assassinated, which led the girl to be displaced to another city, where she could no longer continue her human rights work within her community. Sandra Camilla concluded by calling for the reparation of victims and for peace agreements to be respected, stressing that children need to be able to live in peace and dignity.

Furthermore, both Sandra Camilla and Haya agreed that awareness-raising on gender equality and work at the community level were necessary measures to ensure the protection of girl human rights defenders and to tackle cultural perceptions according to which women and men are not equal. This includes, Haya highlighted the need for institutions or organizations that work with girl human rights defenders to develop and adopt a gender perspective, and provide specific human rights education and training.

In closing, Ms. Jimenez-Damary reiterated her commitment to supporting the empowerment of child human rights defenders, in particular those in situations of internal displacement, and stated that her next report to the United Nations General Assembly in 2019 will focus on the rights of internally displaced children. She also noted that 2018 was the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,²⁰ which calls for the special protection of children in situations of internal displacement.

4.3.4 Role of legislature, Children’s Parliaments

Speakers: Mr. Patricio Cueva-Parra, World Vision; Haneen, 14-year-old child human rights defender from Palestine

Haneen shared her experience on working with an initiative called “Children with no identity”, which works in schools, and more broadly with the Palestinian community, to raise awareness about the situation of children with no official identification documents or nationality. Now, as a member of the Palestinian Children’s Council, Haneen, together with her peers, is providing reports to the Ministry of Higher Education in Palestine on suitable educational environments for children. Haneen’s experience is a concrete example of how children can be involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of relevant legislation and policies.

Mr. Cueva-Parra stated that Children’s Parliaments, Children’s Councils, Children’s Clubs - or any similar fora supporting children’s participation - enable children to mobilize themselves and build a sense of belonging with like-minded peers. In his experience working in Chile, when children act collectively, they have a stronger voice, are more courageous, and feel more protected, empowered and respected. They find strength, for example, to talk to the school principal or member of the local parliament and to make positive changes in their communities.

At the same time, the discussion also identified challenges faced by Children’s

²⁰ UNHCR Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

Parliaments. For example, one speaker stated that if the membership of a Children's Parliament is not diverse or inclusive, it can actually perpetuate patterns of inequality and exclusion based on race, ethnicity, social status or other factors. It was also noted that in many countries Children's Parliaments are initiatives with a strictly educational objective, and there is no mechanism in place to ensure that governments effectively listen to, and take into consideration, the views and decisions of Children's Parliaments. The discussion consequently highlighted the need to further examine the different types of measures that need to be taken in order to ensure that the views expressed by Children's Parliaments, such as the one in Palestine, are taken into due account by politicians and State institutions.

4.3.5 Child human rights defenders in alternative care

Speakers: Mr. Salimane Issifou, SOS Children's Village, Benin; Ryan, 17-year-old child human rights defender from Scotland; Agnes, 14-year-old child human rights defender from Benin

Ryan shared how his experience within the foster care system, which can be traumatic for many children, led him to become a child human rights defender. By the age of nine, Ryan had experienced 15 placements. He believes that if he had not been taken in by his current foster family, his life would be completely different from what it is now, and one that would perhaps have been characterized by drug abuse and no education or secure care. Ryan is part of a movement that has called for a review of Scotland's national care system to ensure children's voices are effectively heard and taken into account in all decisions that affect them.

Agnes, who became an orphan at two years of age and was initially placed in a home with nine other children, also described how fortunate she feels to have found a loving family environment. She stated that she is now fully aware of her human rights, but recognizes that not all children are able to learn about their rights. For Agnes, seeing other children who encountered negative experiences in alternative care settings, has motivated her to become a child human rights defender. "I want others to benefit from the same," she said, "because adults should protect us and defend us, but even as children we should be able to defend ourselves."

Mr. Issifou described the work of his organization, SOS Children's Village, in supporting children in alternative care to become active members of their society, in particular by ensuring that they understand their human rights and are empowered to not only defend and claim their rights, but also to defend the rights of their peers. To this end, the organization conducts training programmes for child human rights defenders and supports them in organizing their own initiatives, including advocacy projects. During the dialogue, participants also discussed the rights of children with disabilities in alternative care, including the need for States to empower children with disabilities to become human rights defenders by building their capacities and ensuring the development of their full potential.

4.3.6 Role of Ombudspersons for children and national human rights institutions

Speakers: Ms. Genevieve Avenard, Children's Ombudsperson in France and Chair of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children; Foyosal, 15-year-old child human rights defender from Bangladesh

The role of national human rights institutions and Children's Ombudspersons is to protect and promote children's rights as embedded in the Convention, and to make sure that public and private authorities uphold them, explained Ms. Avenard. She mentioned that in France, as well

as in other parts of Europe, children in vulnerable situations, such as migrant children, children in alternative care and children with disabilities, are the most vulnerable to human rights violations and require specific support. She said that only ten per cent of children report human rights violations to the Ombudsperson and that the low reporting rate questions the work of Children's Ombudspersons, which does not seem to be sufficiently known by the general public and especially children.

Foysal explained his experience as a member of a coalition in Bangladesh that advocates for ending violence against children and child marriage. Thanks to collaboration between civil society, the government, parents, schools and religious leaders, journalists and political leaders, the coalition set up a helpline where cases of child marriage could be reported to, organized awareness-raising activities among parents and religious leaders, and mobilized journalists, political leaders and community leaders to engage in these issues. A child-friendly helpdesk was also established in a police station to respond to cases of violence against children. Foysal highlighted that helplines and helpdesks are examples of effective mechanisms at the local level to address cases of human rights violations. He added that the coalition lobbied the municipality to allocate a separate budget for children and to have a dedicated unit for children's rights at the Union Council Office.

4.3.7 Summary analysis: State actors and child human rights defenders

Human rights frameworks for the protection and empowerment of child human rights defenders are generally in place, but effective implementation of laws and policies remains a major challenge. While there are positive examples of existing national legislation on the protection of human rights defenders, such as in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea, States should be encouraged to develop and adopt specific laws and measures for child human rights defenders, with the support of United Nations human rights mechanisms including the Committee, the Human Rights Committee and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. States also need to address the obstacles that child human rights defenders face, such as by ensuring the effective implementation of specific laws to protect them; ensuring their access to information, education and communications technologies; and revising existing legislation and policies that restrict civil society space. In particular, the increasing tendency of some governments to limit civil society space greatly impedes child human rights defenders from realizing their rights and increases their vulnerability to threats and reprisals.

Another challenge child human rights defenders face, is a lack of respect for their views by decision-makers. States must empower children to participate in all spaces, including in public affairs, by addressing the lack of relevant national legislation on children's right to take public action, which englobes the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Many States have not yet institutionalized mechanisms to facilitate children's engagement with local and national decision makers, and must ensure the systematic inclusion of child human rights defenders at all levels of public affairs. Positive developments such as the establishment of Children's Parliaments need to be monitored to ensure they are inclusive of all children and that the recommendations they generate are duly taken into consideration by governments. Furthermore, States must remove legal and administrative obstacles for children in order for them to be able to establish their own organizations. At the international level, child human rights defenders should be able to participate in the work of not only the Committee but also other United Nations human rights mechanisms, such as the Human Rights Committee.

Insufficient knowledge and awareness about existing mechanisms for human rights protection also limit children's ability to defend their human rights. When child human rights defenders face threats and or reprisals, or experience other violations of their human rights, they need to be able to seek effective remedies. The role of national human rights institutions and Ombudspersons in protecting child human rights defenders, as well as the availability of helplines and local support centres, where they exist, must be better known by children. Awareness-raising and training activities, in particular at community level, on international human rights law and United Nations human rights monitoring mechanisms are also essential for ensuring the protection and empowerment of child human rights defenders. At the international level, States which have ratified the Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on a Communications Procedure should encourage all other States to do the same.

Finally, national legislation, policies and programmes must recognize the particular situation of specific groups of child human rights defenders, including girls, those with disabilities, those living in alternative care and those living in humanitarian contexts or situations of armed conflict. State actors must take appropriate measures to ensure a gender perspective and effectively address the specific challenges and risks that girl child human rights defenders face. For example, national and local institutions working with child human rights defenders could adopt a gender mainstreaming policy, and human rights awareness raising and training programmes could include a specific component on girl child human rights defenders within human rights awareness raising. With regard to the protection and empowerment of child human rights defenders with disabilities, relevant legislation on human rights defenders should include specific provisions on children with disabilities, such as in the example of Mali, and States should strengthen capacity-building programmes specifically for children with disabilities to become human rights defenders. States must also empower children living in alternative care to become human rights defenders, including by strengthening family-based foster care systems and ensuring that children living in alternative care have access to information about their rights, capacity-building programmes and mechanisms for participation in public affairs. Furthermore, child human rights defenders living in humanitarian contexts or situations of armed conflict are particularly vulnerable to intimidation or reprisals. States must, therefore, recognize and protect the work of child human rights defenders living in such contexts, and support United Nations agencies and civil society organizations who are providing them with training and support.

4.4 Working group 3- Non-State actors and child human rights defenders

Moderators morning session (4.4.1 to 4.4.3): Ms. Hynd Ayoubi-Idrissi, member of the Committee; Maxwell, 15-year-old child human rights defender from Zambia and member of the Children's Advisory Team

Moderators afternoon session (4.4.4 to 4.4.6): Ms. Suzanne Aho, member of the Committee; Mazidath, 17-year-old child human rights defender from Benin and member of the Children's Advisory Team

4.4.1 Freedom of speech and violence in schools

Speakers: Mr. Alejandro Cussianovich, teacher and academic; Camila, 17-year-old child human rights defender from Chile; Gabriel, 16-year-old child human rights defender from Brazil

According to Gabriel, schools do not typically support children in resolving bilateral confrontations or responding to bullying, and teaching personnel usually address confrontations between students through punitive measures, with little consideration for the affected children's feelings or emotions. An environment that does not provide a place for the recovery of victims of bullying or confrontations only perpetuates further confrontations.

Camila said that schools should be a place where children can freely express themselves as they grow and mature, and where they should learn more about the world they live in. Regarding freedom of expression, she added that "school is our first point of contact with society, and it should be the primary space in which we can, and learn to, express ourselves. Little by little, we grow and mature and we learn how to express the ideas that we have; schools can help us learn to express our views in a more thoughtful and eloquent way." Partly, this can be done through the school curricula, she recommended, where discussion and active child participation should be a main feature.

Camila commented on spaces to speak as well as to listen: "We want a forum and space for us to be able to speak and to learn how to listen. If people speak to us, we must learn how to listen as well." She said that the 2018 DGD was an important opportunity to have real discussions with adults and to develop necessary actions to create the space for children to listen, to speak, and to be taken seriously. She said that this can be a problem with some adults, not necessarily all.

Most of the time, national education systems do not effectively include child participation: "children are expected to sit, listen, and stay silent. The content does not engage children or relate to their reality. School curricula is often "overloaded and unrealistic, but schools simply want to tick the boxes", Gabriel stated.

As Mr. Cussianovich highlighted, education should be understood as a life-long process and not just school education. It is important to move away from a "one size fits all" approach in terms of education: there are, in fact, a lot of children who are not in the formal education system and some receive alternative schooling because of existing conflicts in their respective communities - all of these groups have specific needs in terms of education. School curricula should aim to positively shape the lives of boys and girls and be flexible so as to adapt to different and changing realities.

Participants agreed that schools are a crucial part of a child's life, and must be a safe space for children to realize their human rights. To that end, school curricula should systematically incorporate human rights education.

4.4.2 Role of business and donors

Speakers: Mr. David Schofield, Group Head of Corporate Responsibility, Aviva, a multinational insurance and asset management company; Mr. Murhabazi Namegabe, Bureau pour le Volontariat au Service de l'Enfance et de la Santé (Voluntary Force at the Service of Childhood and Health), the Democratic Republic of Congo; Rose Ann, 17-year-old child human rights defender from the Philippines

Rose Ann stated that businesses and donors must make concerted efforts to listen to communities and understand what kind of support children require, and recognized that there are both good and bad business examples. She talked about businesses coming to her community to use children in street situations to market their products, by giving them free products and then taking pictures of the children holding them. None of these businesses asked

what the community needed, and once the pictures were taken, the businesses would disappear, never to be heard from again.

Rose Ann then told about a business that set up sporting activities for children in the community and returned consistently week after week. At first, they were sceptical that the organization would be there again the following week, but the business continued to return. This approach was effective because it took children in street situations away from the dangers of the streets and the rubbish dump where they would work, and gave them consistent and quality care. Rose Ann noted that children are empowered through their right to play, “they forget their problems when they play.” She concluded by saying, “my message to all of the businesses and donors is that you do not become an obstacle to our development. Listen to us.”

Mr. Schofield, described a project that had been developed to support the rights of children in street situations, where the most important objective was for the children to spend quality and consistent time with trustworthy adults. He underlined that child human rights defenders have the power to inform businesses, including through social media, and to ensure that their actions do not contribute to human rights violations. Donors need to shape programs and actively listen to children if they really want to get to the roots of the communities’ needs. Businesses are in a strategic position because they can bring together several stakeholders, including human rights defenders, local and national governments, academic institutions, and the media, to hold informed conversations and take positive actions. Mr. Schofield encouraged governments to assess corporate regulations, so that businesses examine human rights performance, such as in relation to human slavery. Businesses must also use the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to assess their human rights performance. He concluded: “there are many things that all of us together as different actors can do, but the most important is the vital voice of child human rights defenders.”

Mr. Namegabe shared his experience working in a non-governmental organization to address the use of child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He stressed that victims are also human rights holders and that “donors can support children as active participants in the defence of their own rights.” For example, donors supported human rights organizations in setting up institutions for children to actively participate in decision-making processes, such as Children’s Parliaments, Ambassadors for Children’s Rights and Child Reporters. In relation to businesses empowering child human rights defenders, Mr. Namegabe stated: “We certainly want to keep protecting children in a context where there is very little regard and respect for human rights defenders; we also want to try to get it across to businesses that it is an important factor to support this work amongst children's organizations.”

The discussions highlighted the important role of large businesses in supporting children in vulnerable situations, including by investing and mobilizing resources. While businesses can support children as human rights defenders, they can also continue to abuse human rights in their business activities. Therefore, businesses that violate human rights need to be held accountable, and the Committee and other human rights mechanisms should encourage stronger collaboration across the business and human rights sector and involve children in the process.

4.4.3 Empowerment through monitoring and reporting

Speakers: Mr. Jorge Freyre, Save the Children; Luigi, 17-year-old child human rights defender from Guatemala; Angelica, 15-year-old child human rights defender from Guatemala

Luigi sees his work as a child human rights defender as “a quest for justice,” and said that the media, including the radio, is an important tool to give attention to the reports submitted by children to the Committee under the State reporting process.

Angelica said that “sometimes there are reprisals against us or against our families because of the opinions we express in the media when we hold meetings on the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee.” She told of an example of a child human rights defender who was stopped by the authorities from making a statement and was called in for questioning. Angelica added that in her case she completed a training programme and received a badge identifying her as a human rights defender and accorded her protection for her work. The badge also included an emergency phone number she could use in the case of threats.

Mr. Freyre stressed that formal mechanisms and support organisations, with appropriate resources to facilitate effective child participation, are necessary in order to ensure child human rights defenders involvement in monitoring and reporting processes. He added that children must be a part of every stage of the State reporting cycle, from the Committee’s pre-sessional working group to the session when recommendations are made. Children must also be involved in the follow-up and evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations, where they can monitor what is happening and be involved in their implementation.

Participants agreed that non-governmental organizations play an important role in making the participation process more accessible and creating safe spaces for quality participation of children. These spaces can include School Councils, Children’s Councils within local authorities, Children’s Parliaments and Assemblies. The submission of children’s reports helps the Committee to analyse problems from a child perspective. Children must be able to express their views, by written submission or oral testimony, without fear of discrimination, marginalisation or reprisals. Adults must support child human rights defenders in their participation in the State reporting process under the Convention.

4.4.4 Empowerment through transitional justice

Speakers: Mr. Rémy Ngoy Lumbu, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights; Nima, 15-year-old child human rights defender from Côte d’Ivoire

Nima told that in her country, Côte d’Ivoire, transitional justice assists in the identification and assistance of traumatized children, some of whom were left homeless after the war, following mass human rights violations. In her experience, transitional justice “identifies children that need help in moving on from their sufferings. Whether the suffering is mental or physical, reparation is provided which helps children to regain their independence, integrate more easily into society and be empowered. Transitional justice can grant a child their right to reparation, right to search for truth and right to compensation, according to the pillars of transitional justice.” Nima said that “we look for structures that can help children reintegrate into society and find a suitable standard of living.”

Ms. Aho Assouma commended Nima for her attention to the issue of health, in particular mental health, in the context of transitional justice.

For Mr. Ngoy Lumbu, States must be held accountable and it is when they fail in their human rights obligations that human rights defenders, including children, intervene. He highlighted that transitional justice is a responsibility of official authorities and not children, but that “we are all trying to find a successful approach to this issue”. He noted that transitional

justice mechanisms exist but they do not always work smoothly, and asked Nima, in what specific situations she used transitional justice, and, what recommendations would she make to the authorities in Côte d'Ivoire so that the important work of child human rights defenders is carried out more effectively.

A participant asked Nima about her experience in transitional justice and what has it meant for her and her community. Another asked about the support provided to children with disabilities Nima said that the search for truth and identifying families is one pillar of her work; another is connecting children with disabilities, including deaf children or those who are hard-of-hearing or visually impaired, to those who can help them. "Some children were crippled after the war. Transitional justice cannot reverse a disability, but it might be able to provide compensation and there is also the right to reform and to non-recurrence", she explained. Transitional justice can help children in street situations who have been traumatized and alienated to be successfully reintegrated into society. Nima added that children in conflict with the law are often armed, so security and law enforcement authorities are trained to rehabilitate these children, so they do not use weapons against other children. There are specialized centres to help these children reintegrate into society.

Mazidath asked about the situation of girls who were victims of human rights violations suffered during conflict, including those who became pregnant. Nima responded that girls who are mothers can receive support from a crèche or an orphanage if they are unable to take care of their children, they are assisted to register their children at birth, and once they feel properly reintegrated back into society mothers can have their children back.

4.4.5 Empowerment of girl child human rights defenders

Speakers: Ms. Saneri, Plan International, Indonesia; Mellicentia, 17-year-old child human rights defender from Sierra Leone

Ms. Saneri told about her story as a victim and survivor of extreme urban poverty and the importance of interventions by non-State actors, such as grassroots or international organizations, to empower girls and child human rights defenders. Girls acting as child human rights defenders face specific barriers during their activities, as they are more vulnerable to certain human rights violations and require specific protection and empowerment measures.

Ms. Saneri also told about a project being carried out in over 160 villages in Indonesia, where together with the government, Plan International is establishing and strengthening children and youth forums to actively participate in government decision-making platforms, and promoting the voice of girls. There is also a youth-led collective action and a safe space to raise awareness on girls' rights and contribute to the monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality.²¹

Mellicentia described how her actions as a child human rights defender began with singing and how she became part of an Action for Youth and Children's Network, and later part of the Girls Advocacy Alliance. These networks have been working with community leaders to address issues like sexual exploitation and have them sign by-laws to ensure that children are not exploited or married. The Girls Advocacy Alliance provides training for girls on human rights and works on issues such as "sex for grades" and "bullies in schools."

²¹ [Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls](#)

Mellicentia noted: “I believe in awareness raising because you cannot speak for someone without involving the person himself or herself.”

According to Mellicentia, gender equality is recognized at national level, through laws and policies, but this does not ensure gender equality at the community level. She said that “for the local community, girls should stay at home and do domestic work and the boys should go out and speak to the public and we are like no, this is very, very much incorrect. To have our voices heard, we go to communities in a group, because if a girl goes alone she is not listened to, and by using examples of women role models we showed them all what a girl can do when given the opportunity”. Together with non-governmental organizations, Mellicentia raised issues like teenage pregnancy, child-marriage, sexual exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence, and female genital mutilation. She added that through her collective actions as a child human rights defender, she has participated in government hearings, such as on the allocation of national budgets.

Regarding empowerment, Mellicentia called on governments to create proper mechanisms for child engagement; allocate budgets to specific training activities for girl human rights defenders; effectively implement laws and policies at the community level (“top-down” approach). Quoting Kofi Annan, Mellicentia concluded with a message to girls and boys human rights defender: “we are never too young to lead and never too old to learn.”

Ms. Saneri stressed the importance of States responsibility to ensure that national protection services, in particular for girls, are adequately functioning. She added that protection is an important issue in the digital era and gave the example of a member of a youth coalition for girls who received online threats after being open about her sexual orientation and had to close her social media accounts.

A girl participant told about her experience as a child labourer at the age of eight, and how she became a child human rights defender at the age of nine and how difficult it was for adults to listen and take her seriously; authorities prohibited her participation because she was a girl. She stressed that children need to be recognized and included, and ended by saying: “what is good for children is good for humankind”.

A question from the DGD online platform asked about girls forced into child marriage for dowries in order to feed their families, and the role of human rights defenders in eradicating child marriage. Mellicentia responded that through children and youth groups, they are able to provide peer-to-peer support and monitor the situation of girls in their community.

4.4.6 Environmental child human rights defenders

Speakers: Mr. Michael Windführ, member of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Zarah, young human rights defender from the Philippines

Zarah, who describes herself as a human rights defender of the environment, was a victim of a typhoon and afterwards took part in annual mangrove planting which involved children, indigenous people, local government and communities and international volunteers. Since the Philippines experiences 20 or more typhoons every year, mangroves are planted to reduce the impact of flooding and damage to property. She told that through these livelihood projects, there is awareness-raising on topics such as waste management, planting vegetables, pollution and the use of fertilizers. There is a “Mobile Education Project”, where children learn about their human rights and the environment. In relation to empowerment and environmental issues,

Zarah said that awareness-raising is very important and can be done through promotional videos and concerts.

Mr. Windführ said that global environmental change is affecting more human rights and disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups, and that addressing environmental challenges needs to take into consideration the people whose lives are affected. He added that “environmental human rights defenders, including those struggling for land rights, are often threatened when challenging patterns of unequal access to resources”, and noted that whilst human rights defenders used to solely focus on civil and political rights, now they are also work on social and economic rights.

For Mr. Windführ another important issue is the limited access to the media for those working on environmental and human rights issues, and that human rights defenders, particularly children, need to be protected and supported by their communities and relevant institutions, to be able to speak out.

Noting the dramatic changes in the global environment, Mr. Windführ said that “we need the impatience of environmental child human rights defenders to get things done and we don't have a lot of decades left to do this.” He stressed the importance of child and youth engagement to force adults to take action, and the need to raise awareness on relevant issues at the community level.

During the discussions, participants raised the issue of pollution and environmental problems, in particular those caused by large businesses, how these businesses can be held accountable for their irresponsible actions, and how young human rights defenders can be protected. Mr. Windführ noted that States adopted the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights²² but need to create enforceable regulations to ensure that the business sector complies with international human rights and environmental standards.

Ms. Aho Assouma concluded by thanking the children for making it clear that being a human rights defender is a question of conviction, determination and patience.

4.4.7 Summary analysis: non-State Actors and child human rights defenders

Schools have a unique role in children's development and protection, and in teaching them to express themselves, listen to others and resolve conflict. In schools, children can exercise their right to freedom of expression, develop their opinions and learn to be active citizens of society. However, the majority of current school curricula expect children to be passive recipients and continue to rely on punitive measures for education and discipline. It is essential that education systems avoid using punitive measures and promote effective child participation; adapt to the different and changing realities that children live in; and include human rights education and training. Education should go beyond the school walls and include civic education, such as environmental issues. All children have the right to education and to express their views, even children outside the formal school system or in alternative schooling.

Children affected by conflict can suffer a number of human rights violations and transitional justice measures can help children to recover and reintegrate into society. Reparation measures specific to support children victims of physical and/or emotional violence include family reunification, the right to search for truth and the right to compensation. They should aim at empowering children to regain their confidence, self-esteem and independence.

²² [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework](#)

Other measures can be directed at supporting children with disabilities, and although transitional justice cannot reverse a disability, it may provide compensation and ensure the right to non-recurrence. While children's involvement in transitional justice is welcome and necessary, responsibility to guarantee adequate reparation lies with the State.

Empowerment and protection measures for children need to take into consideration that girls acting as child human rights defenders face specific barriers, and are more vulnerable to certain human rights violations. In most countries, gender equality is recognized through laws and national policies, but at the community level girls need to be actively involved in children and youth forums and participate meaningfully in decision-making fora. Specific training for girls human rights defenders and the promotion of their collective participation in issues that concern them is critical.

Children human rights defenders working on environmental issues can face intimidation, harassment and even violence from authorities, particularly when working on pollution caused by large businesses and access to land and other natural resources. In some cases, the media can also be controlled and restricted. Addressing environmental issues under the human rights framework increases the protection and empowerment of environmental child human rights defenders, as it specifies the obligations of the State. On the other hand, children's sense of urgency and determination are essential to tackle global climate change in a timely manner.

Businesses and donors must make concerted efforts to actively engage with the communities they interact with, understand what kind of support children require and shape their programmes accordingly. There are positive examples of donors who support children in exercising their human rights, such as helping set up institutions for children to participate in decision-making processes, like Children's Parliaments. Businesses that violate human rights should be held accountable and governments should assess corporate regulations against human rights standards.

Children can be empowered through monitoring and reporting on the implementation of human rights to international human rights mechanisms. The media should pay adequate attention to children's submissions and participation in the State reporting process under the Convention. However, children and their families can face reprisals for their opinions or activities and States should take specific measures to protect them. These can include the creation of formal mechanisms, with adequate resources, to facilitate child participation in every stage of the State reporting cycle, i.e., the follow-up, implementation and evaluation of recommendations made by the Committee. Human rights mechanisms should encourage deeper collaboration across the business and human rights sector and involve children in the process.

4.5 Closing plenary

In the closing plenary moderated by Mr. Hans Brattskar, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations in Geneva, four Committee members provided an overview of the discussions and recommendations of the working groups and the DGD hubs.

Ms. Kristen Sandberg, as the rapporteur for working group 1 on online space, highlighted the role of information and communications technologies in promoting the rights of indigenous child human rights defenders, who used the online space to preserve their language and culture, and child human rights defenders with disabilities, who used the Internet to advocate for their rights, communicate with each other and form associations. For many such children, the right to form online groups was extremely important because it was sometimes the only way they

could organize themselves. Furthermore, as online spaces provided an opportunity for children to meet face-to-face with decision-makers and Heads of State, child human rights defenders must be empowered to organize and implement their own initiatives through their own platforms that are safe and reliable. In this regard, all information and guidelines on online safety must be accessible to children in different online formats and promoted through social media, so that children can learn to empower themselves for their own protection and recognize situations where their protection might be at risk. She further noted the importance of sharing State-led good practices, such as the use of digital media to engender debate and provide feedback to the Government in Brazil, or the implementation of the Council of Europe guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment.

In the discussions of working group 2 on State actors, presented by Mr. Benyam Dawit Mezmur, it was clear that very few States have specific laws in place to protect child human rights defenders. At the same time, the participation of child human rights defenders in public affairs, including through Children's Parliaments, school councils and drama groups, were powerful forces in promoting human rights. Child human right defenders in armed conflicts, both in wars but also in wars on drugs, face dangers that are often not recognized, and sometimes face multiple forms of discrimination. It is therefore important that those different layers of discrimination are addressed. The discussions also highlighted the necessity of connecting national, regional and international efforts.

Finally, Ms. Ann Skelton shared an overview of the discussions in working group 3 on non-State actors, which identified community as a place where children can have a positive impact. Child human rights defenders can help others by holding street protests or parades, or organizing theatre groups in their local communities. On businesses and donors, the working group discussed both good and bad examples of businesses in relation to children. Not all businesses set out to harm children, and children had enormous power as buyers of goods and could refuse to buy from businesses that violated children's human rights. The working group also discussed empowerment through the Committee's monitoring and reporting process, as well as through transitional justice and the four pillars of truth, justice, reparation and non-recurrence; and girls as human rights defenders, where some issues, including female genital mutilation, were tough to talk about. With respect to environmental child human rights defenders, Ms. Skelton noted that global climate change is increasingly affecting human rights, but the space for human rights defenders continues to shrink. Therefore, it is important for all stakeholders to recognize that environmental issues are also human rights issues and support the work of environmental human rights defenders.

In his presentation on the findings of the DGD hubs, Mr. Bernard Gastaud noted that the first step to ensuring the protection of child human rights defenders was to implement the Convention, including by holding discussions on the topic at national, regional and international levels. Furthermore, the empowerment of children as human rights defenders should incorporate three elements. First, a child's decision to become a human rights defender must be a free choice. Secondly, children need to be able to defend their rights in a safe environment, which is not the case in many countries. Finally, children need to receive specific and comprehensive information in order to make fully informed decisions about participating in decision-making processes. In this regard, the DGD hubs also highlighted the important role of adults in facilitating those discussions, but with a creative approach.

Mr. Michel Forst reminded States that all of the provisions contained in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders applied also to child human rights defenders, and said that he will include the situation of young human rights defenders in his future reports. He also emphasized that measures to protect and empower young human rights

defenders must be gender-sensitive and address sensitive topics, including those related to gender identity and sexual and reproductive rights. Furthermore, collaboration among various stakeholders, such as the media, business sector and academia, is essential in ensuring that “today’s recommendations became tomorrow’s reality”. Finally, he stressed the importance of addressing reprisals and intimidation of child human rights defenders.

On behalf of the Committee, Mr. Luis Pedernera thanked the child participants for their contributions and stressed that child human rights defenders do what they do not to be protagonists in their stories, but because they genuinely care about others’ struggles for a decent life. In recent years, the Committee has made a stronger effort to listen to the views of children, and this approach has had a massive impact on the Committee. Taking the words of a former director of the United Nations Children’s Fund that “democracy is good for children, but children are better for democracy”, Mr. Pedernera stated that “the Committee is good for children, but children are better for the Committee”.

Three members of the Children’s Advisory Team also gave closing remarks. Ariadna, a 15-year-old child human rights defender from Moldova, stated that child human rights defenders in her country believed in ensuring that all children have a healthy and happy childhood, with the proactive support of their families, law enforcement officials and the Government. Her peers were not afraid to speak up and address something that they did not agree with, and they were not willing to wait until they turned 18 years of age to take action. She felt that the DGD was a unique opportunity for child human rights defenders, such as herself, to express their views in front of important people. “I know I have the power of my voice!”, she concluded.

For 15-year-old Diana from El Salvador, children should not be ignored or dismissed because they are children. Rather, all children should be made aware of their human rights, because knowing about their rights empowers them to become human rights defenders. 13-year-old Sameer from Pakistan said that the DGD was an opportunity to urge States to develop and implement plans and strategies to empower children to become human rights defenders. It was also important for States to create safe spaces where children could wilfully express their views without fear or hesitation.

In closing, Ambassador Brattskar concluded that the DGD had given the Committee a significant amount of material to reflect on in the coming weeks, months and years, and had generated many recommendations on how to protect and empower children as human rights defenders.

5. Recommendations

Based on the DGD discussions, the Committee endorses the following recommendations with the goal of providing guidance to States parties and other relevant stakeholders to strengthen the protection and the empowerment of child human rights defenders. The recommendations, mainly addressed to States as primary duty bearers, also consider the role of national human rights institutions, the Committee and the UN, civil society, media, the private sector and adults.

5.1 States

5.1.1 General Recommendations

- States should take all appropriate measures to create safe spaces for child human rights defenders, where they can express their views willingly, fully and without any fear, about all matters related to their rights. States should protect child human rights defenders from any form of intimidation or reprisal, or fear of such.
- States should ensure that the views of child human rights defenders are given due consideration in decision-making processes on all matters affecting them.
- States should provide support to families of child human rights defenders to fulfil their role in protecting and empowering child human rights defenders.
- States should ensure that protection measures are not used to reduce the scope of action of child human rights defenders, including in the online space.

5.1.2 Legislation, policy and implementation

- States should develop and adopt comprehensive national laws and policies on protection and empowerment of human rights defenders, including children human rights defenders, integrating a gender and age sensitive approach with special attention to children in vulnerable situations, including children in humanitarian situations, children in alternative care, indigenous children, and children with disabilities. States should ensure that the national legal framework complies with the Convention and allows children to act freely as human rights defenders.
- National legislation should be built upon and include the views of child human rights defenders. During the drafting of legislation, States should consult and take into account the recommendations and the requests of representative groups of children, child-led organizations and child participation mechanisms such as children's parliaments.
- States should ensure the effective implementation of legislation and policies for child human rights defenders, by allocating the necessary human, technical and financial resources.

5.1.3 Freedom of expression and participation in decision-making

- States should ensure that child human rights defenders receive specific, comprehensive and appropriate information so that they can express their opinion and take part in decision-making processes. States should ensure free and accessible information to all children by various means, including the internet.

- States should ensure that child human rights defenders in vulnerable situations, including children with disabilities, children in humanitarian situations, children in alternative care, children living in poverty and minority and indigenous children are also able to freely express their opinion and be provided with gender and age-appropriate support to facilitate their active participation in all matters concerning them.
- States should ensure that Children's Parliaments and any other mechanism for child participation are provided with a clear and meaningful mandate and adequate human, technical and financial resources and are accessible to, and inclusive of all, children without discrimination.

5.1.4 Education

- States should recognize the role of education in the empowerment of children as human rights defenders and take all appropriate measures to ensure universal, free and quality education.
- States should ensure that children receive human rights education including education about children's rights and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.
- States should ensure child participation in schools as a crucial component of their learning process, where children learn to express themselves, develop their opinions, listen to others, and become active citizens. School curricula should aim to engage children and to positively shape their lives. School curricula should relate to children's realities and be regularly updated to adapt to the context and the needs of children.
- States should ensure that education includes conflict management tools and teaches children to resolve confrontation, such as bullying and harassment, in a non-violent manner. School staff should receive appropriate training to use positive, non-violent and participatory forms of education and discipline, and avoid the exclusive use of punitive measures to address violence among children.

5.1.5 Environment

- States should provide a safe and empowering context for environmental child human rights defenders working on, and making, recommendations about environmental issues.
- States should promote a positive narrative about environmental child human rights defenders, including in the media, and facilitate the participation of children and youth in decision-making and implementation of environmental policies and programmes.
- States should ensure that environmental child human rights defenders, including those working on land rights, pollution, climate change, and access to natural resources, are protected against intimidation, harassment and violence.
- States should support activities organized by environmental child human rights defenders, such as information and awareness raising initiatives, and promote their access to the media.

5.1.6 Online access and protection

- States should provide a safe and enabling online space for child human rights defenders, including access to safe online platforms, and training on online safety.
- States should ensure that internet providers and companies facilitate connectivity and accessibility to all children and that safety settings are clear and accessible, including for children with disabilities.
- States should encourage information and communication technology businesses to involve children in the development and monitoring of initiatives and tools for the online protection of children.

5.1.7 Access to remedial mechanisms

- States should ensure that child human rights defenders can access child-friendly complaint mechanisms at the national and international levels to report and file complaints of human rights violations.
- States should consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Communications Procedures to enable child human rights defenders to submit complaints for violations of their human rights to the Committee and seek effective remedy.

5.1.8 Reporting to the Committee

- States should provide, in their periodic reports to the Committee, information on the situation of child human rights defenders and the steps taken to protect and empower them.
- States should encourage and provide opportunities for child human rights defenders to participate freely in the preparation of States parties' reports to the Committee.
- States should not impede or interfere with the participation of children in the reporting process to the Committee.

5.2 Children's Ombudspersons and National Human Rights Institutions

- Children's Ombudspersons and national human rights institutions should disseminate information about their mandate and the work they do among child human rights defenders.
- Children's Ombudspersons and national human rights institutions are encouraged to work more closely with child human rights defenders.
- Children's Ombudspersons and national human rights institutions should support child human rights defenders to report on and seek redress for human rights violations.

5.3 The Committee on the Rights of the Child

- The Committee should recommend States parties to develop, adopt and implement legislation aiming at protecting child human rights defenders and ensuring their participation in the development and implementation of such legislation.
- The Committee should continue to expand the channels of communications with child

human rights defenders and make additional efforts to ensure that its reporting process is accessible to all children, including those from marginalized groups.

- The Committee should strengthen its cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in providing guidance to States on how to integrate the protection and empowerment of child human rights defenders into national legislation and policy.
- The Committee should promote a positive narrative about child human rights defenders by acknowledging good practices and their contributions to the effective implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocols.

5.4 The United Nations

- The United Nations should provide child human rights defenders with information on the United Nations to enable them to effectively engage with its human rights system and provide children with age-appropriate and timely information in a language and format they can understand.
- The United Nations should promote the participation of child human rights defenders in its work related to children's rights, and put in place child-friendly platforms and processes to facilitate children's in-person or virtual engagement.
- Treaty bodies are encouraged to promote the participation of child human rights defenders in the review of States parties, including through the submission of reports and participation in meetings.
- Treaty bodies are encouraged to make recommendations to States parties emphasising the need to adopt legislation for the protection and empowerment of child human rights defenders.

5.5 Civil society

- Civil society is encouraged to empower and work with child human rights defenders, support their initiatives and disseminate information on their work.
- Civil society should facilitate and promote knowledge of children's rights and human rights defenders to a variety of audiences including in a form accessible to all children.
- Civil society should contribute to promoting positive attitudes towards child human rights defenders, in particular girls.
- Civil society should ensure the participation of child human rights defenders in their human rights work, including monitoring, reporting and advocacy activities.
- Civil society should support child human rights defenders in reporting and seeking redress for human rights violations.
- Civil society, when engaged with child human rights defenders, should take all precautions to minimize any negative consequence of these children's human rights activities. Civil society should also aim at protecting child human rights defenders from any form of intimidation or reprisal, or fear of such.

5.6 The media

- The media is encouraged to promote a positive image of child human rights defenders, and report on the human rights activities carried out by children.

5.7 The private sector

- Businesses and donors should ensure that their activities do not, directly or indirectly, harm child human rights defenders and, when relevant, promote their human rights work.
- Businesses and donors should ensure the sustained and meaningful participation of child human rights defenders in the planning and implementation of their activities at local level.

5.8 Parents, family and community members and adults working with or for children

- Adults should actively seek information about children's rights, learn about their obligations in the protection and empowerment of children, and recognize child human rights defenders when they act as such and be inspired by them.
- Adults should respect and support children who are, or want to become, human rights defenders.
- Adults should create spaces for child human rights defenders to express their views, promote their participation in decision-making processes, and ensure that their views are taken into due account in matters affecting them.

6. Annex - Programme of the DGD

Programme of the 2018 Day of General Discussion (DGD) (as updated)

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

“Protecting and Empowering Children as Human Rights Defenders (CHRDs)”

28 September 2018 – Room XVII, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Time	Activities
9:00 – 10:00	Icebreaker/ music/ activities
10:00-10:20	<p>Opening plenary: Introductory remarks <i>Moderator: Renate Winter, Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kate Gilmore, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights • Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders • Keita, young defender, Winner of the International Children's Peace Prize 2015
10:20-11:00	<p>Plenary: Protection and empowerment of children as human rights defenders <i>Moderator: Beatrice Schulter, Child Rights Connect</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mikiko Otani, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child • DGD Children’s Advisory Team: Akanksha (15, Canada), Kurt (16, Argentina), Mazidath (17, Benin) <p><i>Questions & answers</i></p>
11:00 – 11:15	Break, followed by work in three working groups
11:15 – 13:00	Working groups (<i>see details below</i>)
13:00 – 15:00	Lunch break (<i>side events</i>)
15:00 – 16:30	Working groups continued (<i>see details below</i>)
16.30 – 17.00	Break
17.00-18.00	<p>Concluding plenary: Sharing key learnings and recommendations <i>Moderator: Hans Brattskar, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations in Geneva</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working groups’ and DGD Hubs’ feedback by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child • Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders • Luis Pedernera, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child • DGD Children’s Advisory Team: Ariadna (15, Moldova), Diana (15, El Salvador), Sameer (13, Pakistan)

Working groups' methodology

Participants will indicate in the registration form in which of the working groups they will participate:

Group 1: Online space, everything related to the web and digital media.

Group 2: State actors, government, parliament, judiciary, Children's Ombudspersons and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), UN bodies, regional organizations, etc.

Group 3: Non-State actors, children's parliament, civil society, business, media, etc..

Each group will discuss protection and empowerment of children human rights defenders at local, national and international levels.

Every group will open with a short dialogue between adults and children on a certain topic and will continue with an open discussion and short interventions from the participants.

Participants can choose to stay in the same group between 11.30 and 16.30 (with a lunch break from 13.00-15.00), or move between groups.

Plenaries and Working groups' venues

Opening plenary	Room XVII
WG 1 – online space	Room XXV
WG 2 – State actors	Room XXII
WG 3 – non-State actors	Room XVII
Closing plenary	Room XVII

Interpretation in English, French and Spanish provided for all discussions. Sign-language and captioning provided for plenary discussions and for WG 3.

All plenary and WG discussions webcasted on <http://webtv.un.org>

11:15 – 13:00: Working groups

Group 1: online	Group 2: State actors	Group 3: non-State actors
<p><i>Moderators:</i> <i>CRC: Clarence Nelson</i> <i>Children’s Advisory Team:</i> <i>Christina, 16, USA</i></p>	<p><i>Moderators:</i> <i>CRC: Amal Aldoseri</i> <i>Children’s Advisory Team:</i> <i>Hannah, 12, Scotland</i></p>	<p><i>Moderators:</i> <i>CRC: Hynd Ayoubi Idrissi</i> <i>Children’s Advisory Team:</i> <i>Maxwell, 15, Zambia</i></p>
<p>Civil society space for CHRDs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jean McDonald, Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations in Geneva • Amy, 17, Canada <p>Empowerment through digital media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regina Jensdottir, Council of Europe • Melissa, young defender, Brazil <p>Child-led initiatives & protection online</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tomomasa, youth former representative of Study Group on Social Media, Japan • Konstantinos, 16, Greece 	<p>National protection measures for CHRDs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vincent Ploton, International Service for Human Rights • Keita, young defender, Liberia <p>Participation of children in public affairs/freedom of assembly and association</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olivier de Frouville, UN Human Rights Committee • Luis, 17, Peru • Eoyel, 15, Ethiopia <p>CHRDs in armed conflict & humanitarian situations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, UN Special Rapporteur on Internally Displaced Persons • Sandra Camila, 15, Colombia • Haya, 15, Syria 	<p>Freedom of speech and violence in schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alejandro Cussianovich, teacher and academic • Camila, 17, Chile • Gabriel, 16, Brazil <p>Role of business and donors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Schofield, Aviva • Murhabazi Namegabe, Bureau pour le Volontariat au Service de l’Enfance et de la Santé in DRC • Rose Ann, 17, Philippines <p>Empowerment through CRC monitoring and reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jorge Freyre, Save the Children • Luigi, 17, Guatemala • Angelica, 15, Guatemala

15:00 – 16:30: Working groups continued

Group 1: online	Group 2: State actors	Group 3: non-State actors
<p><i>Moderators:</i> <i>CRC: Gehad Madi</i> <i>Children’s Advisory Team:</i> <i>Aishwayra, 17, India</i></p>	<p><i>Moderators:</i> <i>CRC: Jorge Cardona</i> <i>Children’s Advisory Team:</i> <i>Nayeli, 16, Ecuador</i></p>	<p><i>Moderators:</i> <i>CRC: Suzanne Aho Assouma</i> <i>Children’s Advisory Team:</i> <i>Mazidath, 17, Benin</i></p>
<p>Empowerment & protection of CHRDs victims of sexual exploitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Najat Maala M’jid, paediatrician and child rights expert • Himanshu, 15, India <p>Indigenous CHRDs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manuel Lopez, OHCHR Indigenous Fellow • Theland, 15, Canada <p>CHRDs with disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catalina Devandas Aguillar, UN Special Rapporteur on persons with disabilities • Magdalena, 12, Moldova • James, 15, Scotland 	<p>Role of legislature, children’s parliament</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patricio Cueva-Parra, World Vision • Payal, 17, India • Haneen, 14, Palestine <p>CHRDs in alternative care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salimane Issifou, SOS Children’s Village Benin • Ryan, 17, Scotland • Agnes, 14, Benin <p>Role of Ombudspersons for children and NHRIs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genevieve Avenard, French Children’s Ombudsperson & Chair of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) • Foysal, 15, Bangladesh 	<p>Empowerment through transitional justice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rémy Ngoy Lumbu, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders of African Commission on Human and People’s Rights • Nima, 15, Ivory Coast <p>Empowerment of girls CHRDs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saneri, Plan International Indonesia • Mellicentia, 17, Sierra Leone <p>Environmental CHRDs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Windführ, UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights • Zarah, young defender, Philippines

The bios of the speakers are available on Child Rights Connect’s website <https://www.childrightsconnect.org/day-of-general-discussion-2/>