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Agenda item 64

High-level meeting on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Promotion and protection of the rights of children

(a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children

The President: We meet today to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. That landmark document is the cornerstone for the promotion and protection of children's rights worldwide. It reflects our collective commitment to ensuring that every child in every society has the right to a fair start in life. Over the past 25 years, the Convention has created new perspectives on the place and role of children in society, while serving as the basis for important legislation. Indeed, its provisions not only ensure special care and assistance for children, they also encourage their full participation in their communities and in all decisions affecting them.

In 2002, the General Assembly held a special session on children to review progress since the World Summit for Children, which had given a new impetus to global commitments on children's rights. That was the very first time that children participated in a United Nations conference as delegates. Addressing the Assembly, children described their visions of a world fit for them, a world where their fundamental rights are respected, a world without exploitation, abuse, violence, war or

poverty. They spoke of a world with access to health care and education and a thriving environment. As we look back today, we must ponder the question of how far we have come in making that vision a reality.

We should feel encouraged by the significant improvement in the living conditions of children around the world. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have focused national and international efforts, while also generating resources to support a number of key initiatives related to children. For example, mortality rates for children under 5 have been cut in half, partly thanks to immunization campaigns and improved access to clean water and sanitation. More children than ever before attend school, with about 9 in 10 children in developing countries now enrolled in primary education. Extreme poverty and hunger have also decreased.

Yet significant disparities remain. Children born into poor families, living in conflict or post-conflict countries or growing up in marginalized communities do not have the same opportunities to realize their full potential. In many countries around the world, girls still have limited access to education and are at risk of early and forced marriage. Child malnutrition remains a serious issue, as do child labour, child trafficking and child prostitution. We must continue investing in the rights of all children across the world, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, race, disability or economic status. Children are the fundamental building blocks of the future we want. Indeed, by strengthening their capacity to mature into engaged, responsible and productive adults, society as a whole stands to benefit.

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The deadline for the MDGs is quickly approaching. We must now build on their success and ensure that children's rights and well-being are fully reflected in the post-2015 development agenda. With targets for reducing inequality, ending violence against children and combating child poverty, the proposals of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals provide a solid base from which to move forward. It will also be critical to maintain a holistic approach and address other factors that can undermine development gains, such as poverty, violence, conflict, weak governance and the absence of the rule of law. Equally important is the need to ensure mobilization of the resources that will be required to implement a truly transformative development agenda that puts the welfare of all people, especially children, at the forefront.

In that regard, investing in children and young people should be central to discussions on financing the post-2015 development agenda. At the global level, that should translate into new and innovative partnerships between Governments, the private sector, civil society and financial institutions. Firm domestic-resource commitments for children will also be crucial as economies grow and demands for social intervention become more diversified. Governments must ensure that the benefits of growth are shared equally and equitably across groups and generations, focusing in particular on the needs of the most vulnerable.

Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we must ask ourselves if the world is a better place for the child. This afternoon's interactive panel discussion will provide an opportunity to further explore that question. As we reflect on how the next 25 years can result in further promoting the universal realization of children's rights, let me conclude with these inspirational words from the children who addressed the special session of the Assembly in 2002: "We want a world fit for children, because a world fit for us is a world fit for everyone" (*A/S-27/PV.1, p. 8*).

We shall now hear statements in accordance with paragraph 2 of resolution 68/273.

I give the floor to the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Mr. Lake (United Nations Children's Fund): I am truly honoured to speak on such a wonderful occasion as this, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention

on the Rights of the Child, and even more honoured to be doing so on behalf of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who could not be here today because he has important meetings in Washington that he could not get away from. I have often seen how committed he is to the human rights of all people, including, of course, children. I would also like to sincerely thank you, Mr. President, not only for your excellent remarks just now but for your support for the wonderful event held this morning in the General Assembly Hall, as well as for your support for children and children's rights. All of this could not have taken place without your help and support. And let me add my own warm welcome to Teyise Dlamini, who is here and has travelled all the way from Swaziland to speak on behalf of all children and young people. I will be brief so that we can get to Ms. Dlamini all the sooner.

Let me start with an irreverent question. What do Dr. Seuss, the beloved author of children's books, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child have in common? The answer is that they both believe that, as Dr. Seuss wrote, "A person's a person, no matter how small". That is likely the first time that Dr. Seuss has been quoted in the General Assembly Hall; I also believe that it will almost certainly be the last. But his words are fitting today as we celebrate the Convention's twenty-fifth anniversary. Why? Because the health, soul and intelligence of a society are measured by how the human rights of its youngest and smallest citizens are recognized and acted on everywhere. That is why the Convention, the most rapidly and widely ratified human rights treaty in history, was such an important milestone. For the first time, it articulated the principle that regardless of gender, ethnicity, economic status, religious belief or disability, all children, everywhere, possess innate rights, no less than adults — rights to health, education, protection and participation, for all.

But a recognized right is not necessarily an executed right. Children's rights are brought to life not simply through pronouncements but through policies and persistent commitment. A society's strength is secured not merely through good intentions but through strategic investments. And positive change is achieved not only through powerful words but through practical actions. For without action, without results, the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child amount to little more than words on a piece of paper.

For the past 25 years, Governments, communities, non-governmental organizations, United Nations

agencies, businesses and, especially, children themselves have together translated rights into results. Millions more children are surviving beyond their fifth birthdays, receiving vaccinations against preventable diseases such as polio, and enjoying improved access to education, sanitation, water, nutrition and protection from all manner of abuses.

But for millions of children, life is not better. Life is not better for some 17,000 children under 5 who will die today, mostly because of causes that we can prevent. Life is not better for the 250 million primary-school-age children who cannot read, write or do their numbers, even though more than half of them have spent at least four years in school. Life is not better for around 120 million girls under the age of 20, or about one in 10, who have been subjected to sexual violence at some point in their lives. Think of it — one in every 10. And life is not better for the nearly 570 million children living in extreme poverty, their needs unmet and deprived of their dignity and their rights.

On this day of celebration, we must also ask ourselves some hard questions. How could we let this happen? How could we achieve progress for some, yet continue to fail so many? How could we so betray the promise of the Convention on the Rights of the Child — betray the children most denied the rights that the Convention enshrines? Part of the answer, I think, is this — too often, we have measured progress through national statistical averages. But averages are exactly that — averages. Averages do not capture every life. Averages do not see the children being left behind. The girl kept at home instead of being allowed to go to school. The boy languishing in an institution just because he lives with a disability. The children recruited and brutalized by militias, made to fight for causes they can barely understand, seeing the worst of humanity, and then being forced to inflict that on others.

And in today's turbulent times, the threat to children increases. Syrian children are made to flee far from their homes, making the difficult, dangerous, heartbreaking journey to a refugee camp. They are not only caught in the cross-fire of brutal, protracted conflicts, but see their schools deliberately, outrageously used and targeted for military purposes. The children watching friends, relatives and heroic aid workers fall to the scourge of Ebola, wondering who will be next. Little wonder that the Secretary-General reflected recently that it seems "as if the world is falling apart".

But while the humanitarian community may now be losing ground to those escalating emergencies, we are not losing heart, because the difference between reaching, say, 80 per cent of all we need to do and 90 per cent of our humanitarian goals is not just a statistical 10 per cent. That 10 per cent represents tens or hundreds or thousands of lives. That 10 per cent represents more children being fed, protected, immunized and educated — an inch more solid ground from which a stronger root of development can take hold. The ground we do gain — each child's rights we protect, each child's life we save or improve — is a success that must still be recognized and even celebrated. Such small but significant individual wins will continue to be our primary concern. Because meeting the needs of a child is never a small thing. It is, in fact, everything to that child, her family and community, and thus to her country. And ultimately, to all of us, because, when we invest in children's health, nutrition, education, participation and protection, we invest in all of our futures — in the teachers, doctors, innovators and environmentalists of tomorrow, in the next generation of parents and leaders, who will then guide future generations.

In doing so, we are not only preparing their minds and bodies — we are building their hearts, we are building their spirits. It is our job, our responsibility, our obligation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child to show every child the best of humanity — cooperation, not conflict; humanity, not hatred; reconciliation, not revenge. Children who grow up seeing those qualities around them will be more likely to replicate them in their own lives, more likely to extend them to their own children and their fellow citizens, and more able, and more willing, to shape the world that we leave them. And that in the end is the central message and meaning of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: the importance of preparing today's children to become tomorrow's adults, tomorrow's leaders, and to do so by extending the Convention's promise to those millions of children now being left behind.

As we imagine a better future, let us imagine the moment in 2039 when today's children celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They will celebrate not only promises made but promises kept. They will celebrate results, reflected in the lives of their own children — children who also are prepared to meet their responsibility to build a better world.

The President: I thank the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund for his statement.

Members will recall that in its resolution 68/273 the General Assembly decided that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights would participate in high-level meetings. I understand that Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, is unable to join us today, owing to other pressing business. I should now like to consult members with a view to giving the floor to Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, and without setting a precedent, to invite Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, to make a statement at this meeting?

It was so decided.

In accordance with the decision just taken, I now give the floor to the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights.

Mr. Šimonović (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights): Since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 25 years ago, we should ask ourselves: is the world a safer place for children? Are children more empowered than they were in 1989? Do they enjoy better health and well-being? There are reasons for concern. Children caught up in armed conflicts continue to be injured and killed, and we see children themselves injuring and killing others. Children are kidnapped in their schools, drowned at sea while trying to flee conflict or poverty, exploited through child labour, induced via the Internet to join armed groups, or they fall victim to paedophile rings. Young girls are forced into marriage or not allowed to go to school, or they become victims of harmful practices. Children are also bullied and cyberbullied because of their disability, ethnic origin, sexual orientation or other perceived difference. Some then take their own lives. Girls starve themselves to conform to ideas of beauty. The picture of modern childhood looks grim.

However, at the same time we also have good news to celebrate. In aggregate terms, children today have access to a better standard of life, more education and a higher level of health than ever before in the history of the world. In most countries they are not allowed to go to work at an early age. Thanks to digital media,

accessed through new information and communication technologies, children have vastly greater opportunities to learn, participate, play, work and socialize. We have explored only a fraction of the opportunities that this technology presents for empowering children. That technology is also facilitating a child's right to be heard and children's participation in decisions affecting them. Children are finding their voice, and the legitimacy of their voice is now widely recognized.

From standing up for their rights to education to seeking governance reform in their communities, we see an increasing number of children not only expressing their views but taking the lead in social movements. I also think that it is fair to say that, in 2014, if violations occur, children have far greater possibilities for gaining access to various complaints mechanisms and for seeking redress than they did 25 years ago.

Many of those positive developments are fragile, and, certainly, great inequalities among States and within States persist. There remains much to be done. An example is States' obligations under article 24 of the Convention to eliminate preventable child deaths. Efforts over the past 25 years have resulted in a staggering 17,000 fewer child deaths each day. The challenges remain, however: some 6.3 million children under 5 years of age died in 2013. With the knowledge and technology available today, that is inexcusable.

Deep inequalities and pervasive discrimination lie at the root of most of those deaths. We must stop considering child mortality to be an inevitable fact of life. To that end, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the World Health Organization recently released technical guidance on a human-rights-based approach to preventing child mortality grounded in the principles of the Convention. The guidance, which was launched two months ago in Geneva, lists tangible, concrete measures that States can take, using a human-rights-based approach, to reduce and eliminate preventable mortality and morbidity of children under the age of 5. The existence of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its globally agreed position that children have rights has laid the foundation for such improvements in children's lives in the past quarter-century.

After looking back at the 25 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we are compelled to look to the future. Now is the time to recommit to the vision of the Convention and to its full implementation. It is

also the time to bring children and their rights more centrally into our peace and security and development thinking and action, notably in the post-2015 sustainable development goals. Our future in those areas depends on our children and our respect for their rights.

While much has been done globally to achieve a rights-based vision of childhood — which is an achievement on the part of Member States — the role of the Committee on the Rights of the Child must be recognized as a driving force through its regular public consideration of State's efforts to implement the Convention and the gradual elaboration of the concrete meaning of children's rights in practice. For instance, the Committee asks all States what they are doing to ensure the coordination of policies relating to children within and across all levels of Government. Do they have a national monitoring mechanism specific to children's rights, like a children's ombudsperson? Is there a specific national budget for children? Are all decisions relating to a child based on the best interests of that particular child, rather than on the interests of the family, community or State?

Such questions posed in 1989 may have been met in many quarters with bewilderment. Today they are accepted and acted upon as a normal part of efforts to render greater fulfilment of children's rights. Let us continue to fight for that noble goal.

The President: I now give the floor to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Ms. Zerrougui (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict): As we have come here today to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is important to look back, as my colleague did, and highlight the long way that we have gone together to improve the protection of children. By ratifying the Convention, some 194 countries in the world have recognized that children, boys and girls, have rights and that Governments bear the primary responsibility for the respect for and protection and fulfilment of those rights.

As the most ratified human rights treaty in the world, the Convention has resulted in a significant international consensus that the protection and promotion of the rights of the child are a moral, social and legal imperative for all of us. It is particularly encouraging to see that the Convention has inspired

a number of positive changes in law and policy aimed at improving the lives of children by framing children's basic needs, such as education and health, as inalienable rights, not as a privilege that only a few can enjoy. The enhanced protection of children's rights has also resulted in tangible improvements for children's development, ranging from a reduction in infant and child mortality to an increase in school enrolment.

However, the progress achieved over the past 25 years remains uneven. In conflict situations, children continue to be killed, maimed, recruited and used by armed forces and groups, and deprived of health care and education. Children continue to be the most vulnerable to the impact of armed conflict in various parts of the world. In my travels to conflict zones, I have met too many children forced to abandon their homes, in some cases without their families. Recently, I met a child who, at the beginning of the conflict in South Sudan, happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. He is now recovering from gunshot wounds and is struggling to walk again. Seven months after he was injured, he still did not know where his family was, but had been lucky enough to be brought to a centre supported by the United Nations to receive treatment. That is, unfortunately, not always the case for every child.

In May 2015, we will mark the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which deals with the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Protocol offers a solid basis for building legal, policy and operational frameworks at both the national and the international levels. Under the Protocol, States are required to ban compulsory recruitment below the age of 18 and to ensure that any individual in their armed forces under the age of 18 does not take part in hostilities. States parties shall also take all necessary measures to prohibit and prevent the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18 by non-State armed groups. To date, 158 Member States have ratified the Optional Protocol, and I would like to take this opportunity to call on those that have not yet done so to take steps towards ratification.

As part of my mandate, I continuously advocate for the protection of children in conflict, with Governments as well as with armed groups. To that end, I engage with parties to conflict and all relevant stakeholders to end violations, including the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. And there is progress to

report. Years of engagement with parties to conflict to end the recruitment and use of children are starting to yield results. Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and, as I said, nearly 15 years after the adoption of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, we can now say that there is an emerging consensus among the world's Governments that children do not belong in national forces in conflict.

Building on that consensus, I launched the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, jointly with UNICEF, to end the recruitment and use of children by Government armed forces by 2016. I hope that we will achieve that result with the support of everyone. In the eight months since we launched the campaign, there has been significant progress. The Government of Yemen signed an action plan with the United Nations committing itself to making their national security forces child-free. Chad completed all the requirements under its action plan and was delisted. The Government of South Sudan formally recommitted to its action plan to end the recruitment and use of children, while in Somalia the Cabinet adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is awaiting ratification by the country's parliament. The Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo has made progress in the implementation of the action plan and has appointed a presidential adviser for sexual violence and child recruitment. In Afghanistan, a road map was developed to accelerate the implementation of the action plan.

I am naturally encouraged by that progress and by the momentum created by the campaign, but there is still a lot of work ahead of us. All concerned Governments and regional and non-governmental organizations must continue to work hand in hand with the United Nations, bilateral partners and donors, if we want to reach the objectives of the campaign. Ending child recruitment by Government forces in the next two years is possible, but only if we work together and share our expertise and resources.

Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child has contributed to greater advocacy and awareness of child rights worldwide, our mission is far from complete. Governments' compliance with and full integration of the Convention into national systems still present challenges. The monitoring and reporting of the six grave violations against children during armed conflict has proved to be an important tool informing the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

in monitoring Governments' obligations outlined in the Convention.

One of the gaps that remains of great concern is ensuring individual accountability for violations of children's rights during armed conflict. I am encouraged by the recent entry into force of the third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in April, allowing the establishment of an international complaints procedure for violations of children's rights, as specified in the Convention and Protocols. That is a step in the right direction to promote child victims' rights and ensure better access to justice.

Since the onset of my tenure, I have made the protection of education and health care a priority, as each day we witness an alarming number of attacks on schools, social infrastructure and hospitals, and on students, teachers and medical personnel. When I met families from Syria who had left everything behind to flee the conflict, the one thing parents said they really wanted was a school that their children could go to. They knew that every month that went by with their children out of school would be very difficult to make up for. The parents I met knew that nothing could replace the comfort of going to school every day, even in the midst of chaos, and they wanted to make sure that their children would not miss out on the chance to build a brighter future for themselves and their country.

It is time to turn aspirations into practice in all parts of the globe and put an end to the suffering of children. I count on Member States to honour the commitments that they have made by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols and by endorsing the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign. I will continue to take all possible opportunities to advocate for stronger child-protection frameworks, and I encourage all Member States to support initiatives that are being undertaken to respond to the challenges posed to child protection in conflict situations.

We shall pursue our efforts to recognize and address the shortcomings and challenges that we face in keeping children safe from the harm of conflict by ensuring that we use the tools developed over the past 25 years to protect children to their fullest. Building consensus on the urgency and importance of our collective action to protect children is critical.

I would like, in closing, to commend the work, dedication and tireless efforts of the child-protection actors, in particular, those who are working in complex

security environments. Child victims count on all of us to stand together to respect, protect and promote their rights. We cannot fail to honour the promise we made to them 25 years ago.

The President: I now give the floor to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children.

Ms. Santos Pais (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children): It is with deep emotion that I am participating in this important commemorative session. I was here, in this very Hall of the General Assembly, 25 years ago, witnessing the formal adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It was a moment of immense joy, in which we celebrated the ground-breaking result of a long negotiation process, in which I had the privilege to participate. I also recall how we had been influenced by the spirit of the great Polish paediatrician Janusz Korczak, encouraging us to place children first and above all legal, political, social and economic differences, and recognizing that children are citizens of today and true agents of change. The Convention reflects that important vision and entrusts us with a compelling mission — to spare no effort to translate its provisions into a tangible reality for all children, everywhere, at all times.

I have the honour to address the Assembly 25 years later and to reflect on whether the world we imagined then has become a reality. My mandate exposes me to the worst and to the best of humankind. The worst is certainly represented by the countless children exposed to violence, often in a pervasive, hidden and concealed manner. We see children intentionally targeted in politically driven processes, manipulated in organized crime, sold and exploited for economic gains, disciplined through violent means, sexually abused in the privacy of their homes, neglected in institutions, bullied in schools, stigmatized and ill-treated as a result of superstition or harmful practices. Every five minutes, a child dies as a result of violence.

Children's pervasive exposure to violence is well documented by United Nations reports, academic evidence and children's heartbreaking stories, which all convey a pressing sense of urgency. For millions of children around the world, life is defined by two words: fear and pain. For them, the world has no safe havens, and nations are missing the chance to build a better world for all. The Convention on the Rights of the

Child recognizes the right of the child to freedom from violence. Yet only 10 per cent of the world's children are protected by national legislation prohibiting all forms of violence, including within the home.

Violence compromises all children's rights. It goes hand in hand with deprivation, high risks of poor health, poor school performance and long-term welfare dependency. In early childhood, the impact of violence is often irreversible. As children grow, the cumulative exposure to manifestations of violence becomes a continuum spreading across their life cycle and at times persisting across generations. Beyond the impact on individual victims and their families, violence is associated with far-reaching costs for society. It diverts billions of dollars from social spending, slowing economic development and eroding nations' human and social capital.

Can we then say that the world is a better place for children? Since 1989, the world has made tremendous strides towards the realization of children's rights. The Convention has triggered decisive improvements in national laws, in the establishment of institutions for the protection of children's rights and in the development of child-centred policies and child-friendly services. The voice of children is being given greater importance and is having an influence on policy-making. Thanks to the Convention, we have better trained professionals, we have seen the emergence of sound evidence on matters affecting children, and we see a positive change in behaviours and attitudes towards children. Progress across countries shows that violence is not inevitable and can indeed be prevented and eliminated.

Thanks to those efforts, children are safer, healthier, better educated and more empowered. But that better world is not good enough. The ambition of children is to help build a world as big as their dreams. If we want to fulfil that aspiration, we need to accelerate our efforts and make sure that the ethos of the Convention inspires the way in which we all design the world. And the best way to succeed is to have children at the drawing table.

My mandate also exposes me to the very best of humankind. And the best comes, not surprisingly, from children themselves. Time and again, I meet child victims emerging from the worst of nightmares, yet resilient, confident, generous and showing us adults the way ahead. In all regions of the world, young advocates join hands with national authorities, civil society and so many other allies to raise awareness about the

detrimental impact of violence and to empower young people to be the first line of protection against the risks of abuse and exploitation. Even in the most desperate situations, children reveal hope for a better world and determination to achieve lasting change. That is much more than just positive thinking; it is about positive achieving. In this year when we commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention, we have a golden opportunity to place the Convention at centre stage and to promote a quantum leap in the protection of children from violence. Placing the elimination of violence against children on the post-2015 development agenda can indeed bring that about.

To conclude, one thing is clear: the elimination of violence cannot be the dream of a few. It needs to become a cause for all. I remain fully committed to that endeavour. Children's rights are more than a set of articles. The vision of the Convention will not be fully realized unless children's rights become one of the pillars that sustain society and are embraced as a core value for the dialogue between generations. A better world for children is simply not enough. We need to aim for its perfection.

The President: I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Ms. Sandberg (Committee on the Rights of the Child): It is an honour to be in the Hall today, in my capacity as Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

November 1989 was historic in many ways, not least because it was the first time that children were recognized as rights-holders in an international treaty. It marked a critical turning point in addressing serious human rights abuses against children, not simply with acts of charity but with advocacy for systemic change, because children had rights that were to be respected. The Convention was the culmination of several decades of work to promote the rights of the child and the creation of a child-specific convention. Today, with 194 States parties, the Convention is the most widely ratified United Nations human rights instrument. Its three Optional Protocols continue to draw support from States around the world, steadily improving legal standards for the respect, protection and fulfilment of children's rights. Those four international legal instruments together can claim over 530 ratifications — a clear sign of

commitment to ensuring that the rights of all children are respected. I would particularly like to congratulate States that have ratified all four instruments, and I call upon all States to ratify the third Optional Protocol on the communications procedure.

Today, there is certainly cause for celebration. The Convention has improved the lives of children, to one degree or another, in all States parties and beyond. Most States have been reviewed by the Committee at least twice, and States are taking measures in line with the Committee's country-specific recommendation. However, there is still a lot to be done. In order to reinforce their commitment to children's rights, I would like to encourage States to implement the Committee's recommendations to an even greater extent. Creating the future we want depends on how we act now. Right now, the Convention and its Optional Protocols must continue to work to bring about real improvements in the lives of children. For that, the participation of all actors in society, including children, is crucial.

The Committee has continually highlighted the importance of child participation and has given it particular attention this year as we mark the Convention's twenty-fifth anniversary. On 24 September, as its main event to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention, the Committee hosted a direct online dialogue with 28 children from 14 countries around the world. The right of children to participate is broader than their right to be heard in matters affecting them. I am speaking about the right of all children to be active agents in the lives of communities at every level, whether in the family, in schools or in the broader community. Their views may differ at times from those of adults, simply because each generation experiences a world different from that of those who preceded it. Children will therefore, inevitably voice unique perspectives. We cannot afford to ignore their voices.

From infancy, children learn to communicate by being communicated with, and they will learn to interact with others based on how they are interacted with. Making children feel that their ideas are immature or unrealistic leaves them feeling unwelcome and more likely to disengage. Children are valuable members of our societies as children and must be engaged with, according to their evolving capacities, throughout their childhood and adolescence, if they are to contribute positively to their communities later when they are adults.

When children take part in discussions about programmes and policies relevant to children's rights, and their ideas are listened to and developed, those programmes and policies are more likely to address the issues at hand. For example, at a past children's meeting, the Committee heard that the State under review had implemented a transportation service to ensure that children with a disability could get to school. However, the buses provided were bright yellow, which was in stark contrast to all the other school buses. They came to be known as the "banana buses". The children explained to the Committee that, while the transportation service was an excellent initiative, it would have been better if all the buses were the same colour. While the intention had been to ensure inclusion, the seemingly small issue of choosing a different colour for those buses had in fact reinforced the misconception that children with a disability are somehow different.

I reiterate that children have a unique perspective that must be sought out and cannot be ignored. Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we still talk about "allowing" children to participate. However, just as we are shocked when an adult is silenced for expressing his or her views, we need to be concerned when children are silenced or kept out. They see the challenges that their communities face, and they are perfectly able to suggest ideas, ideas that can, with the support of adults, be developed into effective solutions.

During the online discussion sessions that the Committee hosted on 24 September, the child participants, aged between 11 and 17 years old, demonstrated that when children receive appropriate information and are supported in forming their ideas and opinions, they can participate meaningfully. The interaction with members of the Committee showed that when adults and children communicate in a spirit of mutual respect, they can produce innovative solutions to the challenges that face our societies. The Committee was thrilled to see and hear the children speaking openly about the challenges that their communities face and, most importantly, how they thought those challenges could be addressed.

In conclusion, it seems clear to me that as we go forward, we must ensure that the Convention on the Rights of the Child keeps pace with the young people for whom it was designed. It must evolve with them and with the generations to come in order to create both a present and a future that honour the standards we

that agreed on and the goals that we set out to achieve 25 years ago. In the design and implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, not only must the voices of children be heard, but their views and their rights must be reflected in the agenda. Children's real participation will be possible only if information is made available, if barriers are dismantled and if we commit ourselves to adapting our ways of working so as to ensure accessibility. We need to create a culture of participation across all age brackets and ensure that our work here matches the human rights situation on the ground worldwide, both now and in the future.

Let me end with a quote from Nelson Mandela: "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children".

The President: I now give the floor to the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Ms. De Boer-Buquicchio (Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography): Twenty-five years ago, the United Nations offered a wonderful gift to children around the world — a treaty that recognized them as rights-holders. The message was loud and clear — children are not mini-human beings with mini-human rights. One hundred and ninety-four countries followed suit by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with a promise to respect, protect and empower children.

Since then, many measures have contributed to keeping that important promise alive. They include the adoption of new laws, policies and action plans, the provision of assistance and protection services, the establishment of child-participation mechanisms, the organization of awareness-raising campaigns and the development of corporate social responsibility. Despite all those efforts, children, 25 years later, have many reasons to feel impatient and even angry. In 2014, there are still people who sell and buy children, who exploit them and regard them as commodities. That is a blatant denial of the human dignity of the child. Allowing that to happen is a betrayal of children and seriously compromises our chances to develop as a society.

Several forms of the sale and sexual exploitation of children have worsened considerably since 1989. The development of information and communications technology has made it much easier for criminals to produce, share and store child-abuse material with full impunity. Estimates indicate that the amount of child

abuse material online runs into the millions of pages, and the number of individual children depicted is most likely to be in the tens of thousands. The age of victims has tended to decrease, and the representations are becoming more graphic and violent.

Child prostitution is still a prominent problem in many countries. The root causes of child prostitution have multiplied. They include early sexualization, the dissemination of sexualized images of children and violence, and peer pressure. The so-called child sex tourism, a critical aspect of child prostitution, has also increased, driven by the overall growth of tourism, the virtual non-existence of prevention measures and the inadequate criminalization of offences. Children are also being sold and forced into marriage.

Although it has become less and less easy to illegally adopt a child, the demand for adoption has continued to increase. That creates the conditions for a lucrative business that results in abuse, corruption and excessive fees, amounting to the sale of children. The sale of organs is another abject form of business that finds its victims among the most deprived and vulnerable of children.

Today, more children are at risk of sale and sexual exploitation than was previously the case. On the one hand, children are increasingly vulnerable to sexual exploitation, as a result of poverty, the humanitarian crisis, underdevelopment, inequality, social norms and broken, dysfunctional families. On the other hand, there is an increase in the demand for sex with children that is coupled with the transnational dimension of the phenomenon.

Hence, coming back to the question, is the world a better place for children? I would say that it depends. For the most vulnerable children, the truth is that the world continues to be a labyrinth filled with traps and monsters, with few places to hide and nobody to turn to for help. In the particular case of the sale of children, child pornography and child prostitution, the significant efforts made through legislation, policies, campaigns and international cooperation have not succeeded in putting an end to those crimes. However, I have no doubt that, if respected and implemented, the principles and rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child would completely change the trend, benefiting the children who were left behind and solving the pending problems. For that to happen, we need political will, public awareness and concerted and continuous efforts.

The current negotiations around the post-2015 development agenda offer an extraordinary opportunity to make a real breakthrough in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Throughout the process of implementing a human rights-based approach to the post-2015 development agenda, we have to involve and empower children, as the best possible experts when it comes to determining their needs and rights. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) offer manifold opportunities and tools for ensuring children's participation and empowerment in the design and implementation of prevention and protection strategies. Children are eager to use ICTs, and we should encourage them to exploit their creativity, their capacity to innovate and their willingness to communicate, turning ICTs into a powerful tool for the defence of children's rights and the expression of children's agency.

Next year, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography will celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of its adoption, a good occasion to go beyond rhetoric and take stock of the progress made since 2000, reflect on ways to bridge implementation gaps and make a strong call in order to gather the necessary effective support for making a reality of the prevention and eradication of the sale and sexual exploitation of children.

Despite the dark picture I have just painted, I still believe that we have at least 2.2 billion reasons to celebrate — as many reasons as there are children in the world. And we also have at least 5 billion additional people who can be mobilized to make the world a better place. When we blow out the 15 candles today, instead of making a wish, I would like to invite everyone here to do something else. I would like them to take a decision on what they are going to do next to make the world a better place for children. And to remind them of their decision, I would like to close with a quote from a beautiful poem by Robert Frost.

“The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.”

The President: I should now like to consult Members with a view to giving the floor to a child representative. If there is no objection, and without setting a precedent, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to invite a child representative,

Ms. Teyise Dlamini of Swaziland, to deliver a statement at this meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now give the floor to child representative Ms. Teyise Dlamini of Swaziland.

Ms. Dlamini (Swaziland): It is an honour to be here in the Assembly to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. And it is indeed humbling to be the voice not only of the kids of Swaziland, Africa and the world, but also the voice of every young girl, everywhere. I feel very proud and grateful for being invited.

People may be wondering how a girl from Mahamba, a small village in Swaziland, gets to grace such an important event as this. Two words — my mother. My mother is a single parent, and ever since I was three, she has been both mother and father to my brother and me. That has been a tough job, but she was determined that we would have a better life than she did, because she gave birth at an early age and had to sacrifice a lot of fun things. Instead, she built her career so that she could provide us with a comfortable life. At home, she taught both of us the importance of self-respect, hard work, equal opportunity and studying at school. She encouraged me to be courageous and to speak up for what is right and what is wrong. Seeing my mother struggle to give us everything we need is what motivates me to work hard every day. Today, I am strong, ambitious and confident because of the way my mother raised me. And I will achieve my dream of becoming a successful leader in society and changing the lives of many children, especially young girls, everywhere.

Not all children have received that upbringing. Not all girls will be able to realize their rights as I have been able to. Not all girls even know what their rights are. That is why I wish that everybody could have a mother like mine. So, every week, I host a youth-empowerment radio programme that discusses issues that affect all children and young people everywhere — issues such as living with HIV, child marriage and violence between teachers and pupils. I try to tell my listeners that they have the right not to be hit in their schools, not to be sexually assaulted and not to have to work when they should be studying.

Today, I have heard many leaders here speak about the progress that has been made in the past 25 years. I

am one of those children. I got my vaccinations. I go to school and my school has toilets — but no soap. I have clean water to drink, and there is a clinic close by. I can speak out and be heard about issues that affect me, even in the General Assembly. That is my story, but it is not the story of all children. Every day, children's rights in countries all over the world are violated at home, at school and in their social circles, and that applies especially to children who live in war-torn societies.

One example is the right to education. In many countries, it is still considered more important to send sons to school, and a waste of time and family resources to send female children. Does that not seem absurd? Especially when we know that educated girls are more likely to delay their first sexual encounter, delay marriage and earn a higher salary later in life. Or take the right of children with disabilities to go to school. There is a girl I know in the village of Ngwenya, near where I live, who is deaf and blind. But the local school has no facilities for her, so she cannot enrol. That is the story for many children with disabilities around the world. We need facilities in public schools everywhere, so that all children can learn together and play together, as we will all live together later in life. Only then will we see every child's talents unleashed.

Or think about the right to protection from violence. Every day in the media, we hear about child or sexual violence. But in too many countries, people blame such things on culture and social practices, so that often laws are not passed protecting children from such threats. Too often, that violence affects girls. Donors invest a lot in empowering the girl child against such violence, and that is good and important. But it is only one side of the problem. Boys still grow up violent because they are not taught how to respect women. They are not taught how to respect us girls. Please, we need programmes to teach boys how to behave and how to respect us girls.

My message to all those here today is that they have done well for some children, but they must do better for all children — all of us. Millions are still crying for help, even 25 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As members look to the next 25 years and plan our post-2015 world, they have in their hands the opportunity to enable us children to realize our dreams in a peaceful and prosperous world. The foundation of that world is safe, healthy, educated children — and empowered girls, registered at birth, enrolled in school, inspired by mentors and thriving in leadership roles. I hope that everyone here will start

this new era for children and youth by listening to us, not just to older people's versions of what they think we want. Decisions that affect us children and young people must start with discussions with children and young people.

In that vein, I ask representatives to please listen carefully, because I am about to teach everyone some Siswati, the language of my country. I want those who talk with their Governments about laws, policies and programmes for children and young people to remember this, especially when someone says "Ah, but we cannot afford that", then one could reply that one was taught "*Bon haila, bon leiba, loya long bebe*". I ask everyone to say it along with me; I want it to sink into the heads of everyone present in the Assembly Hall. It means "Children are the future". It is my way of asking the Assembly, in the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and on behalf of all children in Swaziland, Africa and the world, to please protect us and invest in us today, tomorrow and always.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Mauritania, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Jiddou (Mauritania): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of African States on the occasion of the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

As we gather today to celebrate this anniversary, it is an opportunity to give an overview of the progress made in the implementation of commitments made with regard to the protection and promotion of the rights of the child. The African Group believes that remarkable progress has been made for children in African countries over the past decade, as illustrated by the marked decline in mortality for children under five years of age, improved access to clean water and sanitation, and increased primary-school enrolment in all regions of the continent.

However, profound challenges remain. The continent still has the highest under-five mortality rates in the world, with half of the world's annual 6.6 million deaths in that age group being in Africa. Similarly, over half of the world's out-of-school children live in Africa. One in three children under 5 years of age in Africa is stunted, and an estimated 3.1 million children under 15 years old are living with HIV. As Member States continue to shape the post-2015 development agenda, it is critical for Africa's children to remain a priority and benefit from increased attention and investments.

To address child protection in a sustainable manner, the causes and symptoms of child abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children should be addressed. Research shows that there is a strong correlation between poverty and child abuse and exploitation. While we are commemorating and recognizing the important changes that have taken place in the realization of children's rights, we applaud the progress made but feel that a lot remains to be done to scale up progress in many African countries. African States continue to face the challenges of poverty, political instability, economic and financial crises, climate change and inadequate funding, which make it difficult to provide the infrastructure services needed to cater to the needs of children, particularly children with disabilities.

In armed-conflict situations, African children remain vulnerable as refugees or displaced persons. They witness acts of violence, suffer from being orphaned and lose their education opportunities, even their lives, not to speak of their chance to enjoy their livelihood and be part of a peaceful community. In that regard, we welcome the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflicts, launched jointly with UNICEF in March, which seeks to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by Government armed forces by 2016. The African Group would like to seize this opportunity to commend UNICEF for its work and pledges to remain engaged to help that organization carry out its mandate. UNICEF has a proven track record of leading the way in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, and Africa believes that UNICEF will live up to its reputation in that regard in the coming years. The African Group recognizes that resources are key to achieving excellence in the delivery of results for children. UNICEF will never have enough resources to implement comprehensive equity strategies around the world.

We also welcome the partnership agreement signed between the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the African Union in September 2013 and invite her to continue her work on strengthening the child-protection system. We remain concerned about the continued use of schools and hospitals as military targets, including its grave consequences, which are to deprive children of their basic rights to education and health. The Group of African States agrees that violence against children hampers the full enjoyment of their rights and their well-being. The international

community should continue to coordinate its efforts, including through the allocation of appropriate funds, to ensure child protection, child welfare and access to health and education, and to end all forms of violence against children.

The well-being of Africa's children depends entirely on the well-being of their families and communities. The African Group therefore believes that interventions directed towards children must also take a family-centred approach that gives appropriate attention to their families. Young people undergo a variety of new experiences. They need appropriate guidance that will ultimately contribute meaningfully to their personal development as well as to that of their societies. The African States are convinced that children's rights, welfare and protection are at the core of human social development. As such, the African States have committed themselves individually and collectively to take the necessary steps and measures to ensure the protection, survival and development of the child in conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

The African Heads of States and Government adopted an African Common Position on the rights of the child in 2001 in Cairo. That was further reviewed in 2007. The review gave an opportunity for the African States to take stock of the achievements and remaining challenges. It also determined that much more needed to be done — hence the call for accelerated action to implement the Plan of Action towards an Africa Fit for Children (2008-2012) during the African Union Summit in January 2008.

At the continental level, the issue of child marriage is a common concern that is being addressed individually and collectively. African States have launched a campaign to end child marriage in Africa. The Group of African States request international support for the African Union Goodwill Ambassador to End Child Marriage, Ms. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda. She has been tasked with promoting advocacy and raising awareness on the effects of child marriage. The Group of African States believes that child marriage perpetuates problems relating to health, lack of education, gender-based violence, abuse, exploitation, inadequate access to nutrition and services, and the lack of participation in economic opportunities.

Allow me to conclude by saying that, as we define the implementation framework of the post-2015

development agenda and the African Union Vision 2063, the African child remains vulnerable owing, among other issues, to conflicts, inequalities in income and health, unemployment, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Ebola, poverty and hunger, illiteracy and poor-quality education, the vagaries of the economic and financial crises, climate change, restricted access to health services and information, as well as exposure to various forms of discrimination. It is therefore important to give due consideration to the protection and well-being of children in the sustainable development framework. That will help ensure that children, who are our future, are guaranteed the needed peace and security, social investment and appropriate child protection policies crucial to the development of their full capabilities.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

Mr. Masood Khan (Pakistan): I have the distinct honour to make a statement on behalf of the States members of the Group of Asia-Pacific States, all of which have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We thank you, Sir, for convening today's meeting to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention. We also thank UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake and other speakers for their thoughtful statements this morning.

On this occasion, we congratulate Malala Yousafzai and Kailash Satyarthi for jointly winning the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize for their outstanding contribution to the promotion and protection of children's rights. At age 17, the courageous and committed Malala has become the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize and a global icon for the right to education. Kailash is the architect of the single largest civil-society network against the exploitation of children and has devoted his entire life to that cause. We salute both of them and support the sublime causes that they espouse and advocate.

Today is a historic day. As we celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we have a good opportunity to review the progress made so far and identify the challenges that lie ahead. The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention coincides with the culmination of the Millennium Development Goals and an intense process to craft the post-2015 development agenda, based on sustainable development goals. The rights of the child sit at the very centre of all those processes.

Children are the most precious asset of humankind and the builders of its future. Investment in children is not just smart economics, but a compelling moral obligation and a global common good. The landmark Convention on the Rights of the Child has brought us far towards making the world safe and secure for children, without discrimination. The Convention and its two Protocols have stimulated significant progress in the normative structure and practical outcomes aimed at improving the quality of the lives of children all around the world.

Let us first look at the successes. In the past twenty-five years, under-five mortality has been halved. New HIV infections among children have declined, and the number of out-of-school children has been reduced by half. There has been a decrease in child labour among boys and girls. Violence against children and other harmful practices against them have gained greater awareness within Governments and societies. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has inspired Member States to enact new laws and improve existing mechanisms to protect the rights and interests of children.

Now let us look at the glass as only half full. We have a long way to go in order to fully protect children's rights. As we speak, approximately 57 million children are not enrolled in primary schools, and 69 million are not attending secondary schools. Nearly 700 million children face extreme poverty. Some 168 million children are engaged in child labour. Undernutrition remains a major challenge, causing stunting, disease and the death of children living in the developing countries. Children constitute more than half of the global refugee population. Millions are caught in conflicts, and many fall victim to sexual abuse.

The States of the Asia-Pacific Group underscore the need for a determined push and concerted efforts to redress those remaining deficits and overcome challenges in the next 15 years. We should start early and accelerate our speed to achieve our objectives. Our priorities should be the elimination of poverty, the promotion of education and health and the holistic development of children.

The Group of Asia-Pacific States stresses the need to include sufficient, tangible and credible means of implementation for the effective and full realization of all child-related goals and targets. In that regard, the third International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in Addis Ababa in July 2015,

should pay special attention to resources for children. All sustainable development goals, particularly those linked to the rights of children, should be given special attention in terms of the provision of adequate financial resources.

Let me reiterate the firm and abiding commitment of the Group of Asia-Pacific States to the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to the full realization of the rights of the child. The Group will support the efforts of the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations as a whole to maintain a sharp focus on the rights of the child in the emerging post-2015 development agenda and beyond. The Convention on the Rights of the Child promises full and healthy growth and development for all children all over the world. Let us work to fulfil that promise, and let us celebrate the fact that the Convention builds our resilience to pursue that goal.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Georgia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Imnadze (Georgia): It is a particular honour for my delegation to take the floor on behalf of the Eastern European States to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which constitutes the standard in the promotion and protection of the rights of children. This high-level meeting gives us an opportunity to take stock of the achievements in ensuring the protection and well-being of children, to reflect on remaining implementation gaps and to redouble our efforts to undertake additional measures to ensure children's rights.

Twenty-five years ago, the Convention was the first international treaty that recognized the child as a subject with rights and became the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history, obliging States to assume responsibility for ensuring the full protection of the rights of children. The Convention is a major milestone in ensuring children's right to life, survival and development, protection and empowerment. The Convention, with its holistic approach to child development, contributed greatly to creating the conditions for children around the globe to grow in an environment with access to health, nutrition, safety and security. The implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocols will mark another significant step in advancing the child-protection agenda.

We have Ms. Anna Komorowska, the First Lady of Poland, present here today to celebrate this commemorative date with us. I would like to welcome her along with the other guests. Her presence proves the great importance that Poland and our Group attach to the promotion and protection of the rights of children.

Since the adoption of the Convention, States have worked intensely to improve domestic legislation, standards and policies to better protect children. As a result, we have much to celebrate. As outlined in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child" (A/69/260), significant progress has been achieved in the past quarter-century in all dimensions of the child-protection agenda. Nevertheless, the remaining implementation gaps and pressing global challenges demand stronger commitment to the cause of the protection and empowerment of children.

Child mortality, the subject of one of the Millennium Development Goals, remains the most serious challenge of our time. In recent years, the global under-five mortality rate has been almost halved, and new HIV infections among children under 15 years of age have declined by 35 per cent, but we need to continue striving to ensure higher standards of health care for children so as to provide them with timely access to the appropriate health-care and rehabilitation services.

Violence against children remains a major challenge. Millions of children continue to suffer various forms of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. We need to take more effective steps to address the root causes of that problem. We are particularly concerned for children affected by armed conflicts, who bear the burden of war and its atrocities.

Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to poverty, marginalization and exclusion. They often lack access to protection and assistance, and are more likely to be victims of violence.

Education is critical for the development and empowerment of children. Much has been achieved in that respect, but the widespread inequities affecting the poorest and most vulnerable children remain a huge barrier for the realization of the full potential of all children.

In that regard, we take the opportunity to commend UNICEF's leadership in the protection of children and the promotion of children's rights. Over the years,

UNICEF has made significant progress in many areas relating to child protection and has contributed immensely to improving children's lives and advancing the child agenda around the world. We reiterate our commitment to continue to cooperate with UNICEF for renewed global action in the best interests of children.

Today, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, we would like to reiterate our strong commitment to the advancement of the rights of children. We have to aim for an ambitious, rights-based post-2015 development agenda, which is fundamental for ensuring that children feel safe and have opportunities to realize their rights. We need to implement our existing commitments and seek innovative ways to advance the rights of the most marginalized. Let us strive to live up to the expectations of those who will be shaping our future tomorrow.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Carrera Castro (Guatemala): At the outset, I would like to say a few words of congratulation to the young lady from Swaziland, Ms. Teyise Dlamini, on her very inspiring words to this meeting. I would also like to congratulate UNICEF for the beautiful event we had this morning. As a former UNICEF staff member, I take a lot of pride in what UNICEF continues to do. There are many friends present today who have worked together with me in that regard.

(spoke in Spanish)

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. The countries of our regional Group remain strongly committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of children, and we welcome the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as an occasion for us to celebrate the accomplishments, reflect on implementation gaps and undertake additional measures to ensure that the rights of children are fully realized.

As States parties to the Convention, we fully support all mechanisms that contribute to its implementation, in particular the Committee on the Rights of the Child. We reaffirm that States have the primary responsibility to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of children. We firmly believe that the full enjoyment of those rights and

fundamental freedoms can be realized, free from discrimination of any kind, through the implementation of appropriate policies, even with limited resources. It is important in that regard for the actions and policies pursued by those involved in issues related to children to take into account the basic principle of preserving the best interests of the child and a gender perspective, in the light of the particular situation of our girls.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report on the steps taken to achieve a world fit for children (A/69/258). As the report says, there is much to celebrate on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention, from declining infant mortality to rising school enrolment. However, although the international community has achieved significant progress in the past years, global averages, as UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake pointed out, often mask growing inequalities in key indicators, and millions of children are also affected by sociopolitical crises, armed conflicts and natural disasters. We are also concerned by the global figures reporting that 47 per cent of people living in extreme poverty are 18 years old or younger.

We also express our appreciation for the report on the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/69/260). The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States believes that the signature, ratification and effective implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocols will significantly help to ensure that all children fully enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms. We therefore urge States that have not yet done so to become parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocols thereto on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and on the involvement of children in armed conflict as a matter of priority and to implement them fully.

The Group takes note with appreciation of the entry into force on 14 April of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure for reporting individual or mass violations of children's rights. We urge States to consider signing, ratifying and implementing it.

Although substantial progress benefiting children has been made in the region, it remains crucial that we work to assist those living in extreme poverty and to reduce persistent disparities in health, education and other key child well-being indicators, which are closely interlinked developmental challenges. We must ensure that the post-2015 development agenda includes

the poorest and most vulnerable children around the world — children with disabilities, indigenous children, children of African descent and migrant children.

The leadership of our region in advancing the agenda of the rights of children is well recognized. However, as a region comprising mostly middle-income countries, we still have significant challenges and vulnerabilities to fully protect their rights. Vulnerabilities result from poverty and inequality, but also from cultural and social factors such as discrimination and gender inequalities. The progress achieved is also threatened by several risks, such as national or global crises in the economic or political arena, natural disasters, and multidimensional challenges such as violence and organized crime, which affect primarily the most vulnerable groups within our population.

We therefore attach great importance to international cooperation, including the efforts carried out by the United Nations system and its agencies, funds and programmes, particularly UNICEF, which serve to promote the development of all countries and provide support to the design, implementation and evaluation of national public policies promoting the well-being of children and adolescents.

We agree that the participation of communities and children, especially those who are marginalized and at risk, is vitally important in national and local planning, in national and municipal budgeting, and in the monitoring of risk assessment, as well as in prevention, emergency preparedness, response and recovery. All of those factors together strengthen resilience, especially at the local level, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report.

The important role of the media must also be recognized as a useful tool for raising awareness within society regarding the situation of children and the challenges they face. We reaffirm the significant role of the media in initiatives to promote and protect children's rights, the contribution of the media to children's education and the need to pay attention to the media's influence, at times negative, on children.

We must remain focused on ensuring that children's rights and well-being are major priorities in the post-2015 development agenda, which require eradicating extreme poverty, reducing inequalities, eliminating all forms of violence against children and ensuring universal access to justice, in particular for children, when necessary. Such efforts could provide an

appropriate platform to promote and uphold the human rights and fundamental freedoms of today's children, who are, lest we forget, the global leaders of tomorrow.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States.

Mr. Thoms (Germany): I have the great honour to take the floor on behalf of the States members of the Group of Western European and other States.

We wholeheartedly welcome the initiative to hold this commemorative event, celebrating 25 years of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As we have repeatedly heard this morning, it is the world's most ratified human rights treaty to date — an achievement we can be proud of. This anniversary provides the membership of the United Nations with the opportunity to collectively reflect not only on the Convention itself, but on the concrete situation of children the world over, because there is little use celebrating the Convention's anniversary here today if we make no link to how it has improved the futures of those whom it is meant to benefit. In other words, even on the Convention's twenty-fifth anniversary, we must continue to focus on effective implementation — and I dare say that implementation is bound to remain a work in progress for all of us.

Yet, we have ample reason to be satisfied with what we have achieved in the past 25 years. States have come together to protect the world's most valuable asset — our children. We should therefore celebrate the fact that the Convention is now almost universally ratified. In addition, the international community has achieved the entry into force of three additional Protocols, which make the protection of children and their rights more specific, the last of which entered into force in April.

Moreover, we welcome the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. For the past 25 years, its experts have kept the spirit of the Convention alive and diligently advised States on how to improve implementation and adherence. We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Committee on its efforts and wish it continued success in its considerations.

In the same vein, we would like to recognize the mandate-holders involved in protecting the rights of children. It is their personal effort that contributes to the strength of the Convention. We applaud their

engagement and their unfailing dedication to the principles enshrined within it. We must also extend our sincere appreciation to UNICEF, its Executive Director and his staff, many of whom work and live in difficult conditions. We would also like to remember those members of UNICEF staff who have been injured or killed while championing children's rights over the past 25 years. It is also their dedication to children that we celebrate here today. This appreciation extends, of course, to all other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. When it comes to children's rights, the United Nations has no excuse but to deliver as one.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child offers a timeless vision for our world. It sets out a world where all children can live to develop their potential. It envisages a childhood free from violence and discrimination. It emphasizes an environment where children are encouraged to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Some of that has been implemented. According to UNICEF, far fewer children die before their fifth birthday than did 25 years ago, more children are able to realize their right to an education and the proportion of people — and children — living in extreme poverty has decreased. In addition, in every region of the world, the Convention has inspired changes in laws and regulations to better protect children, altered the way international organizations see their work for children and transformed the way in which children are able to take an active role and participate in their communities and societies.

Yet, we have to acknowledge that after 25 years of the Convention, many challenges remain. About 3,500 children will have died by the end of this meeting tonight, mostly from entirely preventable causes. Every 10 minutes, an adolescent girl is violently killed. Eleven per cent of girls worldwide are married before they turn 15. Hazardous child labour remains prolific, and many children do not, therefore, receive a formal education. There are nearly 230 million children under age of 5 worldwide whose births have never been officially recorded. I could go on like this, but allow me to leave it there.

A great deal more needs to be done to fulfil the vision that the Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out for us. It is our wish that the twenty-fifth anniversary will provide new impetus for more action. And we believe that the United Nations, both as an organization and as a platform, has much to offer in that regard.

In the context of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention, it is especially fitting that the Nobel Peace Prize this year will be awarded to two defenders of children's rights, one of them herself still a child. The award underlines the important contribution of civil society and human rights defenders. Although the primary responsibility to protect, promote and fulfil human rights lies with States, civil society's leadership on children's rights has and continues to be indispensable for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. States must, therefore, take all necessary measures to protect civil-society organizations from violence, threats, retaliation, adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action.

We are confident that when States and civil society work together, we can create a positive change for children. New technologies and innovative approaches

to development will make this world a better place for them. By drawing on the skills and expertise of all people everywhere — across countries and cultures — we can achieve a sustainable implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In that way, we can protect future generations, promote their rights and create prosperous societies. It is with that spirit of optimism that I would like to close this statement.

The President: We have heard the last speaker for the high-level meeting on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 64.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.