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Official Records

President: Mr. Muhammad-Bande (Nigeria)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

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

Agenda item 66

Promotion and protection of the rights of children

The President: I warmly welcome everyone to this high-level meeting, which is being held in accordance with resolution 73/301, of 20 June.

Today is World Children's Day. It therefore is only right that the General Assembly Hall be taken over by children and young people. This is their Hall. I extend a warm welcome to the youth joining us online. This is one of many events taking place around the world, and I thank everyone for championing the rights of the child.

Thirty years ago, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted. It was a milestone that extended the impact of children in a rules-based international world order. The fact is that our children have individual rights too. Member States have taken steps to uphold those rights to protect and empower children, who had been told for too long that they should be seen and not heard.

The policies and concrete actions that have been adopted to fully implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child have led to higher child survival rates owing to the progressive realization of their rights and the fulfilment of obligations enshrined in the

Convention, namely, on health, nutrition, education and protection. Yet we have more work to do as, sadly, not every child enjoys his or her childhood.

Millions of children today continue to face obstacles in realizing their rights to the most basic social services, including adequate health care, education and protection from violence. In particular, we must work to reach zero-hunger and achieve nutrition for all by ending childhood obesity and stunting, the latter of which affects one in five children worldwide.

We are facing a crisis of learning and need to radically improve equal access to quality education for children everywhere. Current estimates show that approximately 265 million children are out of school at this very moment. That is a scandal. We must remove all barriers to education. We must ensure, at a minimum, universal access to quality basic education for every child everywhere.

In a rapidly developing and ever-more complex world, we must ensure that information and communication technology is integrated in curriculums, so that young people are not just literate but digitally literate. Those skills are essential to the future success and the full engagement of youth in society.

The digital gender gap is stark. Today 1 billion girls and women lack the skills necessary to succeed in an increasingly digital world and develop expertise through the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. We need to prioritize the girl-child among national priorities, especially as a total of 650 million girls globally are reported to have been

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married before reaching the age of 18. It is crucial that girls be encouraged to stay in school and attain the necessary capacity for mental and human development. Congruent to that is the need to provide second-chance education programmes, sanitation facilities and a safe path to school for girls.

While access is one problem, quality is another major problem. More than half of the students who are enrolled in school are not meeting minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics. The situation is more dire in poorer countries and in countries in conflict. Of the children who are out of school, one in four live in crisis-affected countries, including those affected by the climate emergency.

More countries are experiencing violent conflict today than there were at the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We must ensure that international humanitarian law is upheld and that schools are never a target. We must ensure every effort is made to work towards target 16.2 of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable Development, which calls for Member States to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against, and torture of, children.” As we enter the decade of action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we must ensure that all actions to meet the SDGs are realized, while upholding the rights of all children everywhere.

We are the guarantors of the future of our children. We are duty-bound to act together to ensure that they not only survive but also thrive. I commend all Member States that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I trust that they will recommit to the full implementation of the Convention. I call on those that have yet to do so to ratify the Convention without delay.

I say to our youth that they understand the challenges facing their generation better than the rest of us. They took to the streets to call on us to take action on climate and other issues that are of key importance to them, as well as to us. We hear them. They are stakeholders in their own future. Cynicism can be overcome only through action. I urge them to take action in their own communities and speak up when they face challenges. They are surrounded in this Hall by people who are listening to them and who want only the very best in life for them. This feeling is not limited to today. It is our responsibility to listen to them and uphold their rights. It is also an affirmation of our humanity.

In accordance with rule 70 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General, Her Excellency Ms. Amina Mohammed, to make a statement on behalf of the Secretary-General.

The Deputy Secretary-General: I especially welcome our children representatives and those children living with disabilities, who have such special abilities, to the United Nations.

Nations joined together 30 years ago to make a promise to the children of the world. For the first time in history, the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognized that children have the same rights as adults, and additional rights because of their special status as dependents.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the rights of every child. It is the most widely adopted international treaty in history, and we look forward to the day when all United Nations States Members give it their full backing. The Convention recognizes the rights to health care, nutritious food, clean water, education, protection and safety from violence, peaceful assembly, a voice and a future. Those rights apply to all children in all countries, regardless of religion, disability, language or ethnicity — all rights for all children.

Thirty years later, more children are in school. More are surviving past their fifth birthdays, with the mortality rate for those younger than 5-years-old declining by more than half between 1990 to 2016. More are getting the food, clean water and sanitation that they deserve and have a right to. But our work is far from done. We have not kept our promises to all the world's children, and many are at risk of being left behind.

They are sometimes hidden from view, but we know who those children are. They are children who have been forced from their homes by conflict or natural hazards, like floods or droughts, who are living in temporary settlements that cause permanent damage. The children left behind are living in slums and isolated villages without health clinics, going to bed hungry and without clean water to drink. Stunting and wasting affect more than 200 million children in our world. They may be recruited as child soldiers. They may be labelled as terrorists. They may be sexually abused, imprisoned and forced to work as slaves. An estimated 10 million children are in slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and other forms of forced labour worldwide.

Girls are at particular risk of being taken out of school and forced to marry and have children while they are still children themselves.

The future belongs to children. But unless we act now, many of today's children will face a bleak future. The next 30 years will pose very serious challenges to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our climate is in crisis. There is deepening inequality. Technology is transforming our world, and maybe even increasing the divide. Record numbers of families and children are on the move. With 10 years to go, we are still not on track to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Secretary-General has called for a decade of action to raise ambition and accelerate action across the Sustainable Development Goals. Children must be at the heart of all our efforts.

We will continue working with Governments to develop new programmes that can keep all children safe, healthy and in school. We will work with businesses to uphold children's rights, find new ways of delivering health care, raise more resources to invest in children and use technology to reach children with education and training and prepare them for the opportunities of the future. We will work with the global community to rebuild trust, prevent and end wars and conflict and lay the groundwork for lasting, sustainable peace. We will gather the world around the urgent need to address climate change and take action to slow the warming of our planet. And most of all, we will work with children, to hear their ideas, voices and dreams for the future.

The most important leaders of our time are children. Passionate, engaged child activists from all regions of the world are sending a wakeup call to the older generations. They are rightly demanding action on the climate crisis, gender inequality, human rights and economic systems that prioritize short-term gains over the health of our planet and its people.

Thirty years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is time to listen to the voices of our children and hear their pleas for the broken promises to be fulfilled. Are we listening? Are we ready to work hand in hand with and for children and young people for a better, fairer, safer, healthier and more sustainable world? As we celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of this landmark Convention on World Children's Day, let us match young people's aspirations with our action. Let us commit to putting children first,

every day. Let us build a brighter future together for every child and every right.

The President: I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for her statement.

I now give the floor to Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Ms. Fore (Executive Director, UNICEF): I thank everyone for joining us today as we mark 30 years since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We need the voices and ideas of all those present as we continue putting children's rights at the heart of national plans and policies and living up to the Secretary-General's call for a decade of action on the Sustainable Development Goals.

The achievements the world has made since the Convention was signed are undeniable. More children are in school than ever before. More are vaccinated and getting the health care that they need, closer to where they live. Rates of child marriage and open defecation are falling, and, best of all, more children are living past their fifth birthdays than at any moment in history.

But our task today is not just to celebrate the progress of the past three decades, but to accelerate progress for children's rights in the next 30 years and to realize those rights with concrete programmes. We need to finish the job that we started in 1989 because today, as we meet in the General Assembly, millions of children around the world — especially the poorest — are still not getting the vaccinations, nutrition and education they need, as the Deputy Secretary-General just outlined so powerfully.

Millions are living through the horrors of conflicts; seeing their homes, schools and local hospitals destroyed; watching helplessly as their families and friends are injured or killed; and making the long, perilous journeys to safety in neighbouring countries. And today children are facing new challenges to their futures — challenges that were unimaginable in 1989: climate change, increasing migration, safety in the online world and conflicts that last longer and longer. Children's rights are at a crossroads. We must match the historic gains of the past 30 years with a new commitment to support children in this enormously complex and ever-challenging world.

Please join UNICEF as we work with our global partners to build on the progress of the past three decades and to match today's words with action. We

must deliver more primary health care in communities where people live, design new programmes that help young people get the skills that they need to get jobs and work with businesses and innovators to develop new technologies that can deliver everything from quality education and medical test results in remote communities, to instant birth registration so that children can enjoy their right to an identity.

We need to invest in programmes that teach parents and families to make the right food choices and create good nutrition, while working with the food industry to ensure better local availability of fresh and healthy foods. We need to help communities living through wars and natural disasters to build new schools, hospitals and water systems that can withstand future emergencies.

We also must work with all parties to conflict to encourage dialogue so that there is respect for international humanitarian law and to end the wars that are putting a generation of children in danger. Finally, we must work towards getting every girl in school, so that they can build a life of their own choosing, free from child marriage and early pregnancy. And we must listen to young people on issues that impact their lives, as well as their ideas and solutions for a brighter future.

The best pathway to a better, more sustainable future for all is to invest in all children today. As we look forward to progress in the next 30 years, let us recommit to children's rights. Let us make those rights real in programmes, policies and services in every community, in every country, around the world. I wish everyone a very happy World Children's Day.

The President: I thank Ms. Fore for her statement.

I now give the floor to Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Ms. Gamba: Concern for children's rights and their protection brought world leaders together in 1989 to make a historic commitment to children and adopt a common standard around which to rally. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, however, is much more than a human rights convention for the protection of children and the fulfilment of their rights. It is the recognition that children, including those affected by armed conflict, are holders of human rights and should be considered not only as objects of protection but

also as individuals who can be agents of change by exercising their rights.

The Convention states that childhood is separate from adulthood and lasts until the age of 18. It is a protected time in which children must be allowed to grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity and without discrimination. Conflict was, and remains, however, the greatest threat to that principle and to the realization of children's rights contained in the Convention. For children trapped in conflict zones, the concept of childhood as set forth in the Convention oftentimes remains a distant dream. At the same time, during times of war, the vulnerability of children is compounded by the violence and turbulence that accompany conflict, meaning children are in dire need of specific protection more than ever.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is at the heart of the international legal framework for the protection of children affected by armed conflict and a guiding source of operative principles and standards for the mandate that I represent. A direct link with this protection can be found in its article 38, on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts, and article 39, which stresses that States parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and the social reintegration of a child victim of armed conflict.

Other rights contained in the Convention are also important for the protection of children affected by armed conflict, such as a right to birth registration and the right to acquire nationality, as set out in article 7. Even during armed conflict, States parties are required to ensure that all children — boys and girls — are effectively protected against all forms of physical, sexual or other forms of violence, abuse or exploitation, as enshrined in articles 19 and 32 to 38. States parties must also implement the rights that are critical for children's survival and development, including the right to the highest attainable standard of health, in article 24; the right to benefit from social security, in article 26; the right to an adequate standard of living, in article 27; the right to education, in article 28; and the right to rest and leisure and to engage in play and recreational and cultural activities, as set forth in article 31.

While being an appropriate tool for the protection of children affected by armed conflict, the Convention is a starting, rather than an ending, point. The standards contained therein have therefore been upgraded at the

international level, including through the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as at the regional level through, inter alia, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. They have been further strengthened through Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict, as well as through political commitments such as the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

Standards set on paper alone do not change the world for children affected by war. What is needed is their full implementation through the adoption of national laws and policies, as well as enforcement initiatives that address violations of children's rights in conflict. I call on everyone here today to turn their good intentions into real change for children. Let me finish by echoing the words of Nelson Mandela, who said that our children are our greatest treasure; they are our future. Those who abuse them tear at the fabric of our society and weaken our nations. That remains true for all of us.

The President: I thank Ms. Gamba for her statement.

I now give the floor to Ms. Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children.

Ms. Maalla M'jid: Thirty years ago, the Convention on the Rights of the Child reframed how we understand children's agency and their power. Children went from being passive recipients of services and charity to individual rights-holders with a voice. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is one of the most comprehensive human rights instruments. It includes children's economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. It is equally applicable in peacetime as it is in armed conflict.

That holistic approach is also supported by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Agenda includes a distinct target aimed at ending violence against children by 2030, but the issue also cuts across many of the other Goals. In fact, the SDGs are a crucial tool to realize the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but they cannot be achieved if those rights are not fulfilled.

Thirty years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and almost five years after the adoption of the SDGs, we can see some progress on preventing and eliminating violence against children. That includes stronger legal and policy frameworks and more and better quality data and solid evidence on what works to end violence. We can also see greater coherence and coordination among different stakeholders working for the well-being of children, as well as growing partnerships and coalitions, including with the most important allies of all, children themselves.

We should celebrate the progress achieved since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted. However, we also note that progress is too slow for us to be able to keep our promise to the world's children that they will live free from violence by 2030. Half of the world's children continue to suffer some form of violence every year. There are also disturbing trends and increasing challenges that threaten the gains we have made, including climate change, long-term conflicts, humanitarian disasters, increasing numbers of children on the move, new technologies and the spread of terrorism and violent extremism, as well as remaining harmful social norms and increasing poverty, social disparities, exclusion and discrimination.

The cost of violence is huge for the individual child, but also for the society as a whole. Damaged childhoods translate into damaged families, communities, societies and nations. The financial cost of violence against children to national economies is immense — some have estimated it at \$7 trillion per year. As we celebrate the Convention's thirtieth anniversary this year, we must argue with force and passion for the values that it represents and the system it is part of. Most important, we must create opportunities for children to exercise their own power, be part of the decisions that affect their lives and be real agents of change.

There is an urgent need to mobilize global leadership for children and the right to live a life free from violence in peaceful, just and inclusive societies. We must galvanize action at the global, regional and, first and foremost, national and local levels in order to prevent and respond to all forms of violence in all settings. We must ensure that the most vulnerable children are not left behind. We need to ensure a focus on children as a distinct group, as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I welcome the increasing attention being granted to the voices of youth, but at the same time I want to emphasize that the

unique perspective of children cannot be replaced. We need to keep a focus on the whole life cycle of children and young people. We need more effective cooperation among the many actors in the field. Children's lives are not divided thematically to correspond to the mandates of the organizations working on their behalf.

Children are often exposed to more than one form of violence, and in more than one setting. That calls for adequate financing and investment in children, prioritizing those in situations of the greatest vulnerability and marginalization, as well as reliable disaggregated data to reflect the situation of all children, particularly those who are too often uncounted and at the greatest risk of being left behind. That also calls for broader participation throughout the development, implementation and follow-up and review processes of policy responses at the national level. That needs to be accompanied by effective measures to ensure accountability, which requires the meaningful participation of children. Empowering children, listening to their voices and treating them as active participants with full rights will be crucial if we are to make real progress in creating a world for children that is free from violence.

In conclusion, I would like to recall that the latest SDG summit resulted in the adoption of a political declaration in which world leaders called for a decade of action in order to deliver the SDGs by 2030. The effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is also crucial to the realization of the whole range of rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. There is no better time to demonstrate visionary political leadership, and we need to act better and faster. We need to act better and faster for children and with children, not only on behalf of those who are children today but for the 1 billion individuals who will be born between now and 2030 — the children who will inherit the post SDG-world.

The President: I thank Ms. Maalla for her statement.

I now give the floor to Mr. Luis Ernesto Pedernera Reyna, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Mr. Pedernera Reyna (Chair, Committee on the Rights of the Child) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thirty years ago, on 20 November 1989, following 10 years of rich and profound debate, the General Assembly adopted by acclamation the Convention on the Rights of the Child, thereby becoming the first human rights treaty

specific to children, and through which the community of nations acknowledged children's right to have rights, in the words of the philosopher Hannah Arendt. Its 196 ratifications have made the Convention a global instrument, but there is still one State missing before it can become truly universal, which is why today, on this special day, I would like to invite the United States to join the 196 nations that have already ratified the Convention.

The Convention signified an important change in the lives of children — from the virtually unwavering recognition that children are subjects with rights, and as such that all human rights apply to them, to the rapid and surprising changes in national legislations, with their tenets being adapted to meet the standards of the Convention, as well as the national strategies for children that were developed by States as a public policy response, and to the time of the rights of the child. All that brought about undeniable unanimity in public discourse in favour of children's rights, as never previously seen. In that regard, the Committee on the Rights of the Child called on States parties to highlight their commitment to promoting, protecting and realizing the rights of the child, in celebration of the Convention's thirtieth anniversary. Allow me to thank the 51 States that responded to our call, with more than 200 commitments having been made. I invite those that have not yet done so to renew their commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of the child.

Despite the vast improvements made in children's lives around the world over the past 30 years, however, the challenges facing children remain significant and unrelenting. Poverty, inequality, exclusion, criminalization, violence, physical punishment, discrimination, trafficking, sexual exploitation, the death penalty, migration, armed conflict, the consequences of uncontrolled business activity, corruption, impunity and climate change, among so many other matters, are all issues on our agenda that must be urgently addressed. Today we have been brought together by rhetoric on the rights of the child, but adherence to the Convention cannot serve merely as an act of self-promotion. States must make progress in implementing specific strategies to respond to children's issues, and it is therefore urgent that we take action. Beautiful words are rendered meaningless if rights fail to materialize in the lives of each and every child and young person in our communities. While the mantra of the Sustainable Development Goals states that

no one should be left behind, children sadly continue to be left behind.

Nevertheless, there are positive signs. Following decades of adults remaining silent on the lives of children, children and young people around the world have now taken the promotion and protection of all human rights into their own hands, particularly those rights affecting their lives and development. We are all privileged witnesses to one of the most genuine movements to have emerged in recent times, called “Fridays for the Future”. We heard Greta Thunberg say, here in this Hall, that children are watching us and that the world we leave behind for them is our responsibility. Thousands upon thousands of children around the world tell us: “Do not watch us. Join us.” For our Committee, those children, like many others around the world who assert and express their concerns, are child human rights defenders, as we have been calling them since September 2018. This is also an opportune moment to renew our commitment to the children’s rights agenda. As Nelson Mandela pointed out, the Convention is a living document, and in that sense we must re-interpret it in a way that accounts for changes and new realities as well as the wealth and diversity of the many childhoods and young livelihoods around the world, so that the wealth of human and cultural diversity may strengthen our progress in applying the rights of our children and young people throughout the world and in all situations.

Working for the rights of the child must form part of an alliance that transcends the organizations and institutions responsible for children. Working for children’s rights also implies having children present in the human rights agenda. If we lose our reference point on the rights of the child in that agenda, we will be reducing the possibilities for impact and change. Giving a voice to the desires of Member States and human rights holders to take our work to the regional level, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that, thanks to extrabudgetary funding, we will hold an extraordinary one-week session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in the Pacific region. That is exceptional, but we hope that it will soon become the norm in order to ensure that those who cannot travel to Geneva can have access to the work of the Committee. We know that children and young people from the Pacific, who are often marginalized in international debates, will have an opportunity to interact directly with the Committee and have their voices heard and taken into account at the international level.

I would like to conclude by sharing with the Assembly something that took place on Monday at an event in Geneva, where we have also been celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention. Kurt, a teenager from Argentina speaking on behalf of a group of children from all regions of the world, read out an imagined dialogue between humans and the Convention, expressing the wishes of the Convention in the same way a person would usually share their wishes at their birthday party. The wishes of the Convention, according to those children, were that when this generation is gone, those of us that remain must not forget our dialogue with the Convention, or allow a single violation of its content, principles and articles, and that international organizations must work together with children and adolescents so that they can have a direct source of information and increase the level of compliance by States, and finally, that events like these should no longer have a reason to exist, because when that happens, our problems will be over. Let us make those wishes our own. Happy anniversary to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The President: I thank Mr. Pedernera Reyna for his statement.

Before we proceed further, and as mentioned in my letter dated 19 November, I should now like to consult members with a view to inviting Ms. Najat Maalla M’jid, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, to make a statement on behalf of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material, who could not attend today’s high-level meeting.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Ms. Maalla M’jid to deliver a statement on behalf of Ms. Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material, who was invited to address the opening plenary meeting in accordance with resolution 73/301?

It was so decided. (decision 74/507)

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Maalla M’jid.

Ms. Maalla M’jid: I make this statement on behalf of Ms. Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Special Rapporteur

on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material.

“The extent and nature of the sale and sexual exploitation of children have significantly changed in the past decade, leading to a new manifestation of this abhorrent crime, at a time when digitalization, the rapid development and spread of information and communications technologies, migration flows and the ever-evolving and increasing recourse to assisted reproductive technologies have far-reaching implications for children. One of the critical challenges today is the globalization of the Internet and the absence of an ethics code to govern its use, as well as truly global Internet governance.

“Other challenges pertain to the most vulnerable children — who are escaping persecution, conflict, natural disasters or poverty — being subjected to trafficking, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, forced labour and recruitment and use in armed conflicts. Moreover, in the area of assisted reproductive technologies, the for-profit overtone of increasing recourse to surrogacy as a way of family formation raises complex legal and moral issues.

“All those issues have far-reaching implications for children and require rights-based responses at the global and national levels.

“I have also seen huge progress in law, practice and awareness, and today’s celebrations all over the world are proof of that. However, 30 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, respect for children’s dignity and rights continues, at best, to come as an afterthought, instead of being embedded in all our actions and decisions.

“There is no doubt that the sale and sexual exploitation of children are among the worst crimes. Treating children as a commodity and denying them of their individuality and their status as a person is an attack to their fundamental rights. When that happens, it is likely that the consequences will last for a lifetime. The sale and sexual exploitation of children have a huge human cost, but also a social and economic cost. A child’s dignity cannot be an afterthought. In all human enterprises, it must be there by design, whether it is in developing policies, adopting laws, designing software, advancing science, building businesses, running

sports clubs or guiding religious communities. The possible impact on children must be assessed, and children’s rights must be protected, promoted and respected. Any technological, medical, economic or social development that jeopardizes human dignity cannot be considered progress and must be challenged with courage and determination.

“In our journey to protect the integrity and dignity of the child, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child must be our compass for action and should be based on a holistic approach. Prevention is key and must start with addressing the root causes of the exploitation of children. Poverty, social norms or gender inequality are frequently invoked as contextual circumstances. Addressing the social, cultural, gender and institutional constructs that create an environment in which the sale and sexual abuse or exploitation of children is either ignored, tolerated or accepted is an imperative. We need to invest more in protection. We must make sure that children know their rights, that their views matter, that they recognize protection figures and can safely report abuse and challenge any person, no matter the authority or power that he or she has over them. Accountability is hugely important, and the fight against impunity, as well as reparations, are important dimensions of accountability. Too often forgotten, they must be a natural part of our response to the suffering inflicted on a child.

“We are individually and collectively responsible for creating the conditions for children to develop their full potential in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding, as the Convention states. International standards are there to help. They are the common language that facilitates the dialogue. They are also the result of the shared commitment and collective wisdom guiding both individual and collective action. I believe that we all have a huge role to play in order to protect the rights and dignity of the child, everywhere and at all times.

The President: I thank Ms. Maalla M’jid for her statement on behalf of Ms. Maud de Boer-Buquicchio.

I now give the floor to Mr. Andrew Morley, Chief Executive Officer and President of World Vision.

Mr. Morley (Chief Executive Officer and President, World Vision): Everyone picture in their minds a child

they love, and please keep that image in mind for the next three minutes. Every childhood is precious. Children learning, playing, growing and sometimes simply just being a child — that is precious. Every girl and boy has a right to a childhood. Thirty years ago, the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was a watershed moment. It made a promise to all of our children. Nations responded. Countless children and young people have survived and reached their full potential where they would have otherwise not. Children have grown, they have thrived, they have been empowered with dignity and protection. Is the job therefore done? If the job were done, I would have not met Esther in East Africa. Esther asked me if she could tell me her story. She also asked me to share her story with the world.

Esther endured female genital mutilation. Her family allowed her to be sexually abused. She was forced to marry a man described as being “very old”, in return for a dowry of just six cows. She ran away. Her family marched her back to her elderly husband. She was abused again — violently abused, sexually, physically and mentally. The scars were easy to see in her eyes. Esther is just 8-years-old.

This story broke my heart. If our job were done, there would not be millions more girls and boys like Esther still in the shadows. Our children, especially our girls, are facing untold hardships today — heartbreaking abuse and discrimination, their lives destroyed by poverty and conflict. I know, I have seen it. Their dreams and futures have been shattered to the core.

Governments here today promised, in the Sustainable Development Goals, to leave no one behind. How can we therefore allow these atrocities to

continue? All of us here today hold levers of power. All of us can pull those levers to make a difference and close that gap. We need, together, to pick up the pace.

Laws must be implemented in each and every country. We need to really listen to our children and our youth. I ask all present here to consider whether they are listening. We need robust monitoring. We must invest in our children — in health care, education, social services and law enforcement. We must listen to and empower our children. And we must work together, all of us here. All countries need to protect our children and to protect their rights.

For the sake of Esther and millions more boys and girls like her, let us act. Let us do it today. And let us do it together.

The President: I thank Mr. Morley for his statement.

I would like to inform members that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, will deliver a statement at the start of the interactive segment to brief delegations on the event finishing soon in Geneva.

We have heard the last speaker for the opening segment of this high-level meeting. As delegations are aware, this high-level meeting consists of an interactive segment and a plenary segment. The interactive segment will begin immediately following the conclusion of this opening segment.

I would like to remind delegations that the plenary segment will take place this afternoon at 3 p.m. in this Hall.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.