Statement by

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Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues and friends.

Since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 25 years ago, well might we ask: is the world a safer place for children? Are children more empowered than in 1989? Do they enjoy better health and wellbeing?

From what we see in the media, it is hard to see positive change. 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, exploited through child labour, induced via the internet to join armed groups, or fall victim of paedophile rings. Young girls are forced in marriage, are not allowed to go to school, are victims of harmful practices. Children are also bullied or cyber-bullied 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 have good news to celebrate. In aggregate terms, children today have access to a better standard of life, more education and 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 only explored a fraction of the opportunities this technology presents for empowering children. This technology is also driving one of the most impressive developments in since the adoption of the Convention, namely real recognition of the 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. And when violations occur, I think it is fair to say that in 2014 children have more possibilities access complaints mechanisms and seek redress than 25 years ago.

Many of these positive developments are fragile, and - certainly - great inequalities among States and within States persist. And there remains much to do. An example is States’ obligations to eliminate preventable child deaths under Article 24 of the Convention. Efforts over the past 25 years have resulted in a staggering 17,000 fewer child deaths each day. The challenges however remains: 6.3 million children under five years of age died in 2013. With the knowledge and technology available today, this is inexcusable. Deep inequalities and pervasive discrimination lie at the root of most of these deaths. We must stop considering child mortality to be an inevitable fact of life. To this end, OHCHR and WHO recently released a technical guidance on a human rights based approach to preventing child mortality based on 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 morbidly of children under five years of age.

Mr President,

The existence of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its globally agreed position that children have rights, has formed a foundation these and a raft of other concrete improvements in children’s lives in the past quarter of a century.

While much of this credit of moving globally toward a rights-based vision of childhood is owed to the State Parties to the Convention, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has been 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 rights in practice. As a matter of course, for instance, the Committee asks all States what they are doing to ensure coordination of policies related 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 ombudsman? Is there a specific national budget for children? Are all decisions relating to a child based on the best interests of that child, rather than the interests of the family, community or state? Questions such as these 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.

Ladies and gentlemen

After looking back at the 25 years of the CRC, we are compelled to look to the future. This is a time to re-commit to the vision of the Convention and to its full implementation. It is also a time to bring children and their rights more centrally into our peace and security and our development thinking and action, notably the post-2015 sustainable development goals. Our future in these areas depends on our children, and our respect for their rights.

I thank you for your attention.