Thank you, Mr. Chairman

The United States welcomes this opportunity to discuss the many challenges facing the children of our own country and children worldwide. 2013 was a year of unimaginable suffering for some children, and it has left us with haunting images. We were horrified by the Syrian government’s indiscriminate killing of civilians, resulting in the deaths of thousands of children. The Assad regime’s barbaric use of chemical weapons that killed hundreds of children while they slept on August 21 is just one example of the unconscionable torment endured by children in many parts of the world.

We were shocked by the stories of young girls who were the victims of human trafficking, and we were saddened by stories of early and forced marriage. Together, we must remain committed to protect our children from senseless violence, abuse and exploitation, and the terrible suffering they so often endure. They deserve our best efforts and we simply cannot be silent.
This year we also witnessed the power of a child. For the first time, on July 12, the United Nations celebrated Malala Day in honor of Malala Yousafzai, who spoke out for the right of all Pakistanis, especially girls, to an education. She was shot by extremist thugs who do not want girls to have an education. But those extremists did not win—Malala won. She came back strong and with a message. When she spoke to a UN audience of over 500 young people from 90 countries, diplomats, and the UN Secretary General, she spoke about the power of education, calling upon youth to arm themselves with “the weapon of knowledge” and to never remain silent in the face of injustice because “silence is the loudest approval of all.”

With 57 million children currently not attending school around the world, the need for action, in addition to words, could not be more pressing. We commend the leadership of UNESCO, which is tackling this problem with innovative programs designed to get more children – particularly girls – into schools and learning. The accomplishments that young people from around the world highlighted during Malala Day inspire us to act, spurred by a shared belief in the value and transformational power of educational opportunities that all children deserve.
The United States is pleased to note that just a month ago the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on the topic of “Strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage,” which the United States co-sponsored.

The United States appreciates the continued collaboration of all UN bodies and independent experts to further the human rights of children. We commend the lifesaving work being done by UNICEF on a wide range of issues – from preventing child mortality to ensuring child protection, as well as its work with UNFPA to address harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and cutting. The United States – through our President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Office of Global Women’s Issues, the Centers for Disease Control and USAID – is a proud partner of the Together for Girls initiative, together with five UN agencies and the private sector, to address violence against children, particularly girls. We are committed to protecting children’s rights and health and we will continue our work to support data collection and to end all forms of violence against children.

We also wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict for her reports and, in particular, the findings from her recent mission to Syria and other countries in the region. We are gravely concerned about the information she presented regarding the dire situation of
children in Syria, in particular the shelling and use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We also condemn attacks on protected schools and hospitals, the torture and abuse of children in Syrian government detention centers, the unlawful use of child soldiers, and the denial of access to international humanitarian organizations seeking to bring relief to desperate families. In August 2013, according to UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake, the world marked what he called a “grim milestone … the one millionth Syrian refugee child fleeing across Syria’s borders.” We agree with Executive Director Lake that “[t]he world cannot afford a lost generation of Syrian children.”

Finally, the United States commends the Secretary General’s Special Representative on Violence against Children for her tremendous work and agree with the Special Representative that children with disabilities are exposed to heightened risks of violence. Children with disabilities need to be equal participants in every society and need to be given every opportunity to live up to their fullest potential and enjoyment.

Mr. Chairman, the United States is proud of our record in promoting the welfare of children domestically and internationally, and we hope to continue to work closely
with the international community to further strengthen the protection of all our children.

Thank you.