The Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations

Statement by
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First Secretary

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Thank you Mr/Madam Chair,

Since the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child much has been achieved. The Convention and its optional protocols constitute the cornerstone of our work to protect and promote the rights of the child worldwide. With almost universal ratification of the Convention, we urge those states, which have not yet become parties to the Convention, to do so.

In February this year, Iceland became one of the first states to incorporate it into National law. The law was adopted unanimously in the Icelandic parliament. We consider this an important milestone in ensuring children’s rights in Iceland.

Mr/Madam Chair,

Regrettably most countries’ laws do not protect children from violence in the same way they protect adults. Only 34 States have prohibited corporal punishment of children by law while 144 States have not made any commitment to this effect. Violence against children and child abuse cannot and should never be tolerated. Impunity for such crimes is unacceptable. Those who are entrusted with children and abuse that trust must always be held accountable without regard to their position or social status.

In order to maximise the effectiveness of the justice system in Iceland for the benefit of children we have since 1998 operated what we call “the Children’s House”, where child protection services, the medical professions, law enforcement, prosecution and even judges work in a coordinated and complementary manner, investigating cases of suspected sexual abuse and other violence against children.

The Children’s House, which has become a model internationally for a child friendly justice environment, has contributed to more child-friendly judicial processes, making the legal justice system in Iceland more accessible and effective for children. The Icelandic Government has recently decided to enlarge the Children’s House and provide it with additional staff. We would be pleased to share our experiences on this system with interested Member States.

Mr/Madam Chair,

Children are every country’s future. Therefore by looking at how a country treats its children is a good indicator of in which direction that country is heading. A lot of situations pertaining to the rights of children can be rectified easily depending largely on prioritizing and political will. There are, however, situations that are beyond the control of those who normally would be responsible.

In particular this is true in conflict situations, with nearly half of the world’s forcibly displaced people being children. These children are at a greater risk of abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation, trafficking and forced military recruitment. They may also have witnessed or experienced violent acts and/or been separated from their families.
These include the millions of children from Syria, the DRC and Somalia who have been forced to flee their homes. We should also not forget Palestinian children who are still living under occupation with all the restrictions that entails for the full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. UN agencies along with the ICRC and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are doing admirable work with limited resources to help these children. However, we as the international community must do better.

Mr/Madam Chair,

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has so far identified 53 grounds of discrimination against children based either on their own identity or the identity of their parents.

As gender remains one of the main discrimination factors we need to renew our commitment to focus on the rights of the girl child and her empowerment through systematically focusing on girls’ participation and ensure their equal opportunities. One of the most effective tools in this regard is to ensure the right to education for all, girls as well as boys.

Iceland remains strongly committed to the right to education and our investment in education remains one of the best investments we have made for the common good of our society. Free and universal education is key to social equality and a nation’s long-term prosperity. As Malala Yousufzai, the role model for us all, stated when ending her speech at the UN this summer: "One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world."

Thank you Mr/Madam Chair.