Statement by Ms. Neva Ünal,
Turkish Mission to the UN
On “Rights of the Child”

Thank you Mr. Chair,

Turkey is determined to expand the rights of children, as well as choices, opportunities and protections available to them, with a particular focus on the girl. Especially in the last decade, significant steps have been taken to improve the legal and institutional framework protecting and promoting children’s rights.

We are party to major international and regional conventions related to the rights of the child, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. We are in the process of ratifying the Third Optional Protocol to the UN Conference of the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure. Turkey also finalized the ratification process of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, as well as the Council of Europe Convention on Contact concerning Children.

Also, with the constitutional amendments of 2010, children are protected against all forms of violence and abuse. The relevant parts of the Turkish national laws were amended in line with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a milestone development, “positive discrimination” has been codified for children in the Constitution and included in all pertinent laws.

Mr. Chair,

Turkey has launched several creative and comprehensive projects in the last years, to address and respond to the issues, problems and concerns of our children better and to hear their voice. In cooperation with our international partners, such as UNICEF, the EU and the Council of Europe, we have focused on a variety of issues ranging from child protection and juvenile justice system to protecting children from abuse and neglect and children with disabilities.

One example is the “Children’s Rights Website”, launched by the Parliamentary Children’s Rights Monitoring Committee in 2009. Through this website, children can convey their problems, including human rights abuses, to parliamentarians directly with their right to privacy being fully protected.
Furthermore, a Committee on Monitoring and Evaluating Children’s Rights has been established in 2012, in order to strengthen the coordination and supervision activities at the central and local levels, consisting of government officials, NGO’s and provincial children’s rights committees, including a girl and a boy child designated as country-wide coordinators. As another development, an ombudsperson for Women and Children has been established recently which responded also to the demands of civil society organizations.

In addition, under the Ministry of Health, Child Monitoring Centers have been established in several provinces, in order to prevent and respond to cases of child abuse.

Mr. Chair,

Turkey places special emphasis on the girl child, with a particular focus on her education. Turkey has strengthened the constitutional, legal and institutional framework to protect and promote children, and particularly girls’ rights. Many campaigns have been launched in the last decades, to ensure the schooling of girls and close the gender gap in education. As mentioned by the Turkish Prime Minister on the International Day of the Girl celebration held in Ankara last week, “the only discrimination we recognize is positive discrimination”. As a result, numbers of girls attending primary, secondary and university education has rapidly increased, reaching 99 percent in primary school education.

What really brings change in societies comes from the grassroots, through the efforts of citizens’ initiatives, youth organizations and the civil society, through the participation of the private sector and the media. The “Daddy, Send Me to School” and the “Come Girls, Let’s Go to School” campaigns in Turkey, which provided equal education opportunities to many disadvantaged girls who suffer from economic hardship, were excellent initiatives of how change can be achieved.

It was with this understanding that we have co-sponsored the resolution with Canada and Peru last year to dedicate an international day - 11 October - to the girl child. The level of interest to this day is rapidly increasing: this year, the “International Day of the Girl Child” was celebrated worldwide, including in our capital, Ankara. The event titled “Girls Speak Out” was organized this year in New York, under the sponsorship of Turkey, Canada and Peru and received great attention.

The power of countries cannot be measured with financial resources alone. Our children are our today and future, our social and human capital. As such, it is our responsibility towards ourselves to protect and promote the rights of children, as well as to hear their voices and prioritize their issues and concerns.
Thankyou.