STATEMENT
By H.E. Mr. Milorad Šćepanović
Permanent Representative of Montenegro to the United Nations
68th session of the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee
Agenda item 65 - Promotion and protection of the rights of children
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Mr. Chairman,

Montenegro aligns itself with the statement on this agenda item delivered by the European Union.

Mr. Chairman,

The promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of children remains high on our national agenda. As an advocate and active promoter of children's rights, we reaffirm our commitment to work with all countries towards ensuring respect, protection and development of children rights worldwide. In our actions we are closely guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols and remain firmly attached to their full implementation. It is in this spirit that I am proud to point out that Montenegro deposited instrument of ratification for the third Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child during this year’s Treaty Event, thus bringing the number of ratifications to eight. The new Optional Protocol allows for effective remedies when violations of the rights of the child occur and as such is an important tool to increase the effectiveness of the Convention and reinforce the established child protection systems. For this reason, we appeal to states that have not yet done so to accelerate efforts in order to sign and/or ratify the third Optional Protocol so that it enters into force at the earliest. Entering into force of this Optional Protocol will bring us a step closer to our ultimate goal of a world where children’s rights are respected universally.
Mr. Chairman,

Montenegro has established stable normative and institutional framework and is strongly dedicated to continue to implement measures and intensify activities at all levels that aim for constant improvement of the rights of the child. It is through the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as of national legislature and policies that we keep strengthening our infrastructure for children’s rights, therefore bringing it closer in line with European and international standards and best practices. By the introduction of provisions in the criminal code sanctioning sexual abuse, trafficking and forced marriage involving children, by recently adopting a new law on social and child protection, with an accompanying strategy, as well as the new national action plan for children, Montenegro has further enforced the system of protection of children’s rights. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Education launched the first national child protection database with a view to providing reliable data on the situation and needs of children.

In discharging our projects and tasks, we continue to enjoy the vital support of UNICEF. Montenegro’s extraordinary and fruitful partnership and cooperation with UNICEF is carried out through the Programme of Cooperation for the period 2012-2016, which serves as a very good platform for joint actions on our common path towards betterment of children’s rights. In this regard, my Government would especially like to thank Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake, as well as UNICEF office in Montenegro and its Head Mr. Benjamin Perks for their efforts and leadership.

Particular attention within our system of ensuring children’s rights is paid to children with disabilities and children without parental care, who are among the most vulnerable members of society. By the way of executing different campaigns, my country has made some significant results in this field. The campaign "It’s about ability", supported by UNICEF, in the last three years has largely contributed to changing attitudes and practices towards children with disabilities in Montenegro. These changes were accompanied by significant systemic improvements in the development of services for children with disabilities, best visible in the area of inclusive education: in less than a decade the number of children with special educational needs attending primary school increased from 67 to 3,600 and the number of children with special educational needs in kindergartens increased from 46 to 670. Having been perceived by UNICEF in its global report as a good and successful example and model that could be utilized elsewhere, this campaign is being recommended to other countries in the wider region.

Another campaign, entitled “Every child needs a family” focuses on awareness raising on deinstitutionalization and development of fostering service. As a result of the ongoing deinstitutionalization process, number of children without parental care residing in institutions in Montenegro has almost halved, from 460 to less than 250
between 2007 and 2013. Let me mention that my Government was pleased to join other regional countries in pledging to end the placement of children under the age of 3 in institutions. Fostering campaign will have major effect on improving services for children without adequate parental care, thus enabling Montenegro to have the opportunity to be among the first countries to ensure all of its children to grow up in a family or family-like environment.

In the area of juvenile justice, Montenegro is recognized as a leader in the region in applying victim-offender mediation for juveniles.

Moreover, Montenegro is honoured to host the first regional meeting for the heads of UNICEF offices in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as of the Commonwealth of Independent States, to be held from 28 October to 1 November of this year. The meeting will be chaired by the UNICEF Regional Director Ms. Marie-Pierre Poirier, with the participation of the Deputy Executive Director Ms. Yoka Brandt, and will represent a useful opportunity to take stock of the current developments and exchange experiences and identify ways to enhance cooperation for children’s rights.

Mr. Chairman,

Montenegro has come a long way in fulfilling a vision of children’s rights, but at the same time we recognize that much work still remains. In this respect, and as the record of my Government indicates, we intend to continue with dedicated efforts to ensure that necessary reforms and measures for children protection are implemented to the full extent.

We can not but recognize that millions of children around the world still suffer from the consequences of war, violence, sexual abuse, recruitment by armed groups, hunger, trafficking, social exclusion, etc. It is our collective duty to do everything we can to make sure that children in every corner of the globe enjoy their rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols. This is our noble goal to which we all have a special responsibility.

I thank you.