

## Annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child

### Theme: The rights of the child and family reunification

*Concept note (as of 8 March 2022)*

<b>Date and venue:</b>	<b>Wednesday, 9 March 2022, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 4 to 6 p.m.</b> <b>Room XIX, Palais des Nations, Geneva and online platform (Zoom)</b> (broadcast live and archived on <a href="https://media.un.org/en/webtv">https://media.un.org/en/webtv</a> )
<b>Objectives:</b>	<p>The annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child will identify the implications of a child rights approach to family reunification, paying particular attention to preventing the separation of children from their families, and to children affected in cross-border situations. The event will be an opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assess the legal, policy and other causes of family separation, with a view to its prevention and to supporting family reunification.</li><li>• Assess the gaps and barriers to realizing the rights of the child in situations where children have been separated from their families, paying particular attention to children who are marginalized and /or discriminated against.</li><li>• Clarify the pathways through which the rights of the child can be achieved for those who have been separated from their families, in particular through strengthened family reunification procedures and the requisite international cooperation.</li><li>• Analyze the implications of applying child rights principles to family reunification policies and procedures, particularly children's right to have their best interest taken as a priority, the right to non-discrimination, and the right to be heard and have their views taken into account.</li></ul>

<b>Morning 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.</b>	<b><i>Family reunification in the context of migration</i></b>
<b>Chair:</b>	<b>H.E. Mr. Tamim M. Baiou</b> , Vice-President of the Human Rights Council
<b>Opening statement:</b>	<b>Ms. Michelle Bachelet</b> , United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ( <i>video message</i> )
<b>Panellists:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Eduardo</b>, Child representative (<i>video message</i>)</li><li>• <b>Mr. Felipe González Morales</b>, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants (<i>video message</i>)</li><li>• <b>Mr. Luis Ernesto Pedernera Reyna</b>, Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (<i>video message</i>)</li><li>• <b>Ms. Daniela Reale</b>, Global Lead on Refugee, Migrant and Displaced Children, Save the Children (<i>video message</i>)</li></ul>
<b>Afternoon 4 to 6 p.m.</b>	<b><i>Family reunification in the context of armed conflict and counter-terrorism</i></b>
<b>Chair:</b>	<b>H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas</b> , President of the Human Rights Council
<b>Video screening:</b>	<b><i>A repatriated child tells his story</i></b> , video prepared by UNICEF (duration 4:17 mins)

<b>Panellists:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ms. Virginia Gamba</b>, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (<i>video message</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Cornelius Williams</b>, Associate Director of Child Protection, United Nations Children's Fund (<i>Zoom</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin</b>, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Helen Durham</b>, Director of International Law and Policy, International Committee of the Red Cross</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome:</b>	The meeting will highlight the plight of children separated from their families around the world, and how their rights are being denied due to lacking policy and procedural guardrails based on the rights of the child. Participants will identify the implications of core child rights principles to prevent family separation and support reunification, in particular, the implications of making children's best interests a primary consideration, non-discrimination, and their right to be heard and listened to on matters affecting their lives. Through the exchange of expertise and experiences the discussion will result in recommendations on how a child rights perspective can support family reunification, and what next steps the international community can take to advance on this basis.
<b>Mandate:</b>	In its resolution 7/29 on the rights of the child adopted in March 2008, the Human Rights Council affirmed "its commitment to effectively integrate the rights of the child in its work and that of its mechanisms in a regular, systematic and transparent manner, taking into account specific needs of boys and girls" and "to incorporate into its programme of work sufficient time, at a minimum an annual full-day meeting, to discuss different specific themes on the rights of the child." Pursuant to its resolution 45/30, the Human Rights Council will focus its 2022 annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child on the theme "the rights of the child and family reunification".
<b>Format:</b>	<p>The duration of the annual full-day meeting will be limited to two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon. For both panels, the opening statement and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by an interactive discussion divided into two segments. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including the opening statement, panellists' presentations, their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two segments of interventions from the floor, with each segment consisting of interventions from 12 States or observers, 1 national human rights institution and 2 non-governmental organizations.</p> <p>The list of speakers for both discussions will be established through the online registration system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. Delegates who have not been able to take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet.</p>
<b>Accessibility:</b>	In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to promote their full participation in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, both panels will be webcast and made accessible. International sign interpretation and real-time captioning in English will be provided. During the meetings, participants can access live English captioning on the web page ( <a href="https://www.streamtext.net/player?event=CFI-UNOG">https://www.streamtext.net/player?event=CFI-UNOG</a> ). Hearing loops are available for collection from the Secretariat desk. Oral statements may be embossed in Braille from any of the six official languages of the United Nations, upon request and following the procedure described in <i>The accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities</i> ( <a href="https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/Accessibility.aspx">https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/Accessibility.aspx</a> ).

**Background:**

All children enjoy the right to family life under international law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet, while limited global data is available, estimates indicate that alarming numbers of children are moving alone or being separated from their families across borders as a result of economic, socio-political, environmental and other factors.

In situations of migration, many children may begin their journeys unaccompanied, or are separated from their families while on the move, in a host country, due to migration detention, or during a repatriation process. Other children particularly affected by family separation across borders are those living in situations of armed conflict and those subject to counter-terrorism measures. The annual full-day meeting will focus primarily on the rights of children separated from their families in these particular cross-border situations.

Children who have been separated from their families may find themselves living alone or under the care of others who may or may not have their best interests at heart. Many are being detained for periods of weeks, months or even years. Children separated from their families are at heightened risk of suffering violence, abuse, neglect, trafficking and exploitation, serious deprivations of their economic, social and cultural rights, and other rights violations detrimental to their lifelong health and development.

Because they are children, they often find no recourse, lack appropriate support and clear pathways to seek family reunification, and may receive no remedy or redress for the rights violations they endure as a consequence. Compounding the situation, a lack of safe and legal options to reunify with family members may compel children to take irregular and unsafe paths to be reunited with their families, placing them at even greater risk.

Children have the right to grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. Family life is the foundation of a child's nurturing, protection and lifelong development. The present status quo in which a patchwork of approaches and priorities are applied to family reunification is failing children, perpetuating a global crisis affecting the multitude of children worldwide who have been separated from their families.

States should deal with all family reunification matters involving children in accordance with the rights of the child, and in a positive, humane, and expeditious manner. All children everywhere are equal in dignity and in rights, which cannot be overlooked, limited, or negated because of their specific situation, including in the context of migration, armed conflict and counter-terrorism.

There is an urgent need to follow up on the matter of family reunification at the global level, on the basis of child rights guiding principles, and a global strategy for family reunification which prioritizes enhanced international cooperation.

**Background documents:**

- Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the rights of the child and family reunification ([A/HRC/49/31](#), February 2022, forthcoming)
- Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism ([A/HRC/40/28](#), January 2019)
- [General Assembly resolution 73/195](#) of 19 December 2018 entitled "Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration"
- [OHCHR and Global Migration Group, Principles and Guidelines, supported by practical guidance, on the human rights protection of migrants in vulnerable situations](#)
- [Secretary-General of the United Nations, The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights \(2020\)](#)

- [Human Rights Council resolution 45/30](#) of 13 October 2020 entitled “Rights of the child: realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment”