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PROMOTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS KEY TO FUTURE DEVELOPMENT, PROSPERITY,

DELEGATES STRESS AS THIRD COMMITTEE CONCLUDES DEBATE

Failing to intervene and invest in children carried a high price for any society, delegates stressed, as the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) concluded a three day debate on the rights of children.

Featuring 46 statements by Member States, the general debate focused on the protection and promotion of the rights of children. Each delegate outlined the substantial national investments they were taking to improve the lives of children.

However, of great concern was the situation of children in armed conflict and the need to protect them from being recruited as child soldiers. Also, of importance was the development of judiciary systems that were child-friendly.

"Despite the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the extent and intensity of violence exerted on children is on the rise," said the representative of Lesotho, who alongside many others, called for an end to violence against children.

On a similar note, Tunisia's delegate said that, in a world with unprecedented technological and economic possibilities, it was unacceptable that more than 100 million children under the age of 5 were underweight and that 2.5 million children died each year as a result of malnutrition.

Echoing that sentiment was the representative of Cuba, underlining that "one out of six children in developing countries is forced to work and millions of children are victims of the illegal trade in organs, pornography, child prostitution, violence and sexual exploitation."

With 37 per cent of its population of childhood age, Mongolia's delegate highlighted that one out of every three of its children lived in poverty — a condition that seriously affected the rights of children to a decent life. "Children are symbols of our future, but their rights should not be symbolic," she said.

Citing the Nobel laureate in economics, James Heckman, who said that early interventions to help disadvantaged children had the best effect and were being economically profitable, Norway's delegate informed the Assembly that each marginalized child who dropped out of the system cost any society the equivalent of about \$2 million. "Failing to intervene and invest in children carries a high price for any society," she said.

Many delegates recognized the long-term economic benefits of social investment in children's

well-being, with the representative of Malta informing of his country's approach focused on prevention and early intervention, as "the keys to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty".

Along the same line, the representatives of Bangladesh and of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia spoke about children being the human capital of tomorrow, recognizing them as the power that moved societies through different stages of development and as an important asset for every country. "There are prosperous countries which are not rich in natural resources, but there isn't any prosperous one without human capital. Children and youth are the potential that creates human capital", the delegate of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia underscored. Solid legislation, good education, proper health care and social protection were the areas through which the future of children could be shaped.

Also speaking today were speakers representing Nigeria, Ecuador, Kuwait, Sudan, Iran, Colombia, Philippines, Morocco, State of Palestine, India, Yemen, Zambia, Botswana, Dominican Republic, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Slovenia, Algeria, Angola, Costa Rica, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Montenegro, Peru, Viet Nam, Holy See, Myanmar, Georgia, Cameroon, Rwanda, Egypt, Libya, Oman, Côte d'Ivoire, Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Azerbaijan, Eritrea and Ukraine.

Others taking the floor included observers from the International Organization for Migration and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, as well as representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Labour Organization.

The representatives of Israel, Saudi Arabia and the observer of the State of Palestine spoke in exercise of the right of reply.

The Third Committee will reconvene at 10 a.m. Monday, 21 October, to begin its discussion on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Background

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) met this morning to continue its general discussion on children's rights.

Statements

JOHN GANA (Nigeria) said his country's laws and policies on the promotion and protection of the rights of children reflected a commitment to the relevant international instruments it had ratified. The National Priority Agenda, for instance, provided quality services to orphans and other vulnerable children in seven thematic areas of education, health, shelter and care, nutrition, protection, psychosocial support and household economic strengthening. "Trafficking in children, within Nigeria and across our borders, remains a major concern to us and we are working relentlessly to fight this scourge," he said.

TINE MORCH SMITH (Norway) cited James Heckman, a Nobel Laureate in economics, who pointed out that early intervention to help disadvantaged children had the best effect and was economically profitable. Analyses indicated that in Norway, each marginalized child who dropped out of the system would cost the equivalent of about \$2 million. Failing to intervene and invest in children carried a high price for any society. Being born as a girl meant having fewer opportunities and being more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Norway welcomed the Secretary-General's recent report on the girl child, which contained important information and recommendations. In Syria, since the start of the conflict two years ago, 7,000 children had died, one million children had fled the country and an additional two million had been internally displaced. "These numbers are difficult to comprehend," she said. "Now we need to act."

XAVIER LASSO MENDOZA (Ecuador), associating himself with the Community of Latin

American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said that his country had integrated the rights of children in its Constitution. Ecuador had also put in place strategies such as the National Plan for Good Living, which had been particularly successful in the fields of health and education. He noted that his country planned to eradicate child chronic undernutrition by 2017 and had advocated against child labour. His Government paid particular attention to the promotion of the rights of children with disabilities and of child migrants, or those whose parents had migrated. More developed countries should ensure that the rights of the latter be respected, he added.

KELEBONE MAOPE (Lesotho), associating himself with the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), was disheartened that despite the almost universal ratification of the Children's Rights Convention, the extent and intensity of violence exerted on children was on the rise. The need to put an end to violence against children, promote their rights and provide an environment conducive for their well-being and development was now more urgent than ever. To that end, his Government adopted a set of measures, including the strengthening of national laws. Partnering with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Lesotho was also drafting a regulatory framework intended to further enhance the child justice system and had joined the global call for providing education for all. In 1996, primary education enrolment was 69.9 per cent, but had increased to 82 per cent by the year 2000 after primary education had been made free of charge.

ABDULAZIZ AL-FALAH (Kuwait) underlined the need to stop any violence against children. He called on all countries to ratify regional and international laws and conventions to create a legal framework on this issue. Kuwait had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol in 2004. It had set up national laws and mechanisms to protect children from abuse and create favourable conditions for their growth. Given the Constitution's specific mention of "the family as the basis of the community", the protection of children and youth was high on the national agenda, which focused on improving education, healthcare and protection from illness for all children. Citing the address by the Executive Director of UNICEF, he expressed deep concern for the situation of children in Syria, as well as in refugee camps in neighbouring countries. Noting that one million Syrian children were refugees, he called on the international community not to ignore them or the children in Palestine, who had by harmed by the "violations done by Israel".

MOHAMED IBRAHIM MOHAMED ELBAHI (Sudan) identified the economic crisis as the "biggest global challenge" as it had a severe impact on the developing countries, especially on the most vulnerable segments of society. Despite that challenge, Sudan implemented specific national legislation for children. The country had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions related to the minimum labour age and the protection of children from forced labour. Specific national measures included the establishment of councils for children and instruments to ensure that no child could be recruited by the armed forces. An awareness-raising campaign on the protection of children had been launched in rural areas to underline their rights in the areas of education, vaccination and protection from violence. Turning to the regions of Darfur, South Kordofan and the Blue Nile, he said that violence had receded in those regions due to the combined efforts of the Government, African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and neighbouring countries. The Government planned a national campaign for immunization against polio to be executed in all areas. In light of the fear that "the North may hamper this campaign", he called on the United Nations to put pressure on those territories to allow the vaccination campaign to be implemented.

FOROUZANDEH VADIATI (Iran) said her country had recently submitted its national periodic report on implementation of the Children's Rights Convention to the relevant Committee. Further, the newly established national focus point for implementing the instrument had been strengthened by the establishment of four working groups in charge of monitoring, evaluation, training, protection, legal and judicial issues. Also, to prevent violence against children, a complimentary mechanism had been designed under the national focal point on children's rights. In Iran, juvenile courts were mandated to hold closed, separate and individual sessions with the presence of parents, legal guardian or lawyer. Offenders under the age of 18 were not sent to prison. Juvenile arbitration councils had been set up to protect the rights of children in the courts. With 2015 approaching, the rights and welfare of children

should be placed at the centre of the post-2015 agenda.

MARÍA PAULINA DÁVILA DÁVILA (Colombia), associating herself with CELAC, said that her country was committed to developing policies that guaranteed the protection of children's rights, as per its Constitution. Over the years, Colombia had strengthened its legislative framework, nationally and internationally. In 2007, it adopted the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups; as a member of the Security Council, it had supported resolution 1998 (2011) on children in armed conflicts; and it had become party to the Rome Statute. On the domestic front, Colombia had focused not only on keeping children and youth away from armed conflict, but also on increasing their access to education, health, quality nutrition, sanitation and drinking water. Since 2012, it had guaranteed an education free of charge. The country had achieved universal primary education, with full equality between girls and boys. Furthermore, Colombia had been active in preventing the recruitment of children in armed conflict, and — for those who had been involved — it helped to dissociate them from armed groups and to reintegrate them.

LISANDRA ASTIASARÁN ARIAS(Cuba) said that, according to recent UNICEF data, one out of six children in developing countries was forced to work, mainly in mining and agriculture. Millions of children were victim of the illegal trade in organs, pornography, child prostitution, violence and sexual exploitation. Human trafficking affected an estimated one million children, and some 20,000 children died every day all over the world. These deaths could be avoided. Since 1959, the Cuban revolution had enabled the eradication of structural inequalities, which were the legacy of the colonial and post-colonial time. Cuba had free, quality healthcare and education systems. In addition to guaranteeing universal education, the Government had set up 372 excellent schools for children with special needs. These achievements, obtained through extraordinary efforts from the Cuban people, were challenged however, by the United States embargo. In fact, some essential medications were not available in Cuban hospitals. She encouraged Member States to reject that embargo once more in the Assembly.

ANA MARIE L. HERNANDO (Philippines) said that her Government had implemented initiatives geared towards the delivery of more inclusive social services relevant to the protection of child welfare, including the provision of free vaccines and a conditional cash transfer programme for poor households to keep children in school. Her country had a comprehensive set of statutes on children's rights, including the Family Code, the Child and Youth Welfare Code and the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006, which had raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 9 to 15. Regarding its relationship with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, her delegation reiterated its long-standing position that engaging non-State armed groups, including cases for child protection, should be careful. Since the situation of children occurred against a complex background, any strategy to protect them should be in harmony with the larger peace processes in the country.

AMINE BELHAJ (Morocco), aligning himself with the Group of 77 and the African Group, said that children paid a high toll due to humanitarian crises and armed conflicts. His country had harmonized the criminal code and national laws in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It had also developed a national programme aimed at creating a “Morocco Worthy of its Children” based on the model outlined in the 2002 document “A World Fit for Children”. Morocco had put in place a strategy to, by 2015, nearly stop students from dropping out of school, to give children earlier access to schooling and to keep them in school until the age of 15. Furthermore, initiatives had been taken to encourage the social and professional inclusion of children and youth with disabilities. The 2006-2015 National Plan of Action focused particular attention on violence against children through the creation of “welcome units” that facilitated access to justice, as well as to medical, psychological and social care.

REEM JULIA MANSOUR, observer for the State of Palestine, said that “generation after generation, Palestinian children have grown up under a brutal military occupation that has continued for more than four decades, which has robbed them of their most basic and inalienable rights with far-reaching negative consequences on their development and their society.” Since Israel was part of the Convention on the Rights of Children since 1991, she called on the country to adhere to its legal obligations throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Children there

were suffering from the lack of access to health care and education, widespread insecurity, and humiliation and discrimination inflicted by Israeli settlers and occupying forces. She then spoke about the situation in the occupied Gaza strip and the situation of Palestinian children illegally held and mistreated in Israeli detention centres and prisons. In conclusion, she said that Palestinian children, like children all over the world, desired and deserved peace and freedom and the opportunity to exercise their inalienable human rights.

Mr. KRISHNASSWAMY (India) stressed that the nation's flagship programme benefited 78 million children below the age of six in the areas of nutrition, health and education. The programme covered immunization, health check-ups and referral services as well as preschool, non-formal education to 37 million children aged three to six. India manufactured 40 per cent of the vaccines used in universal immunization programmes around the world. The national Constitution provided for free and compulsory education for children up to the age of 14. With nearly universal enrolment for primary education, the Government was focusing on expanding secondary education and its access for girls, and on skills development for improved employability. India observed 24 January as "National Girl Child Day" to generate awareness about their tremendous potential and highlight the challenges facing them.

FATIMA AFARA (Yemen) said that "children are the generation of the future" and are counted on to build the country. For this reason, Yemen had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. At the national level, his country had established institutional mechanisms to translate that Convention into action on the ground. This included a ministry for mothers and children and a committee for youth and children. Furthermore, efforts were made to monitor violations of the rights of children, including preventing their recruitment into armed forces. Despite financial constraints, the Government was making efforts to improve its health care as evidenced by being granted polio-free status since 2008. Turning to the issue of human trafficking, he underlined poverty as a major challenge and called for doubling national and international efforts to tackle this issue.

ANNE SINYANGWE (Zambia), aligning herself with SADC, said she was cognizant of the special protection required with respect to children's rights and of the country's obligations, as a sovereign State, to ensure that all children enjoyed their civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights without discrimination. "Every so often, the very society that is meant to protect and assure the safety of children has been hostile and dangerous for the very children it is supposed to protect, especially the girl child," she said. Like many countries, Zambia had a high prevalence of harmful and traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation and early and child marriages, which it had vowed to stem out through a robust campaign utilizing all key stakeholders, including traditional leadership as champions to end early marriages. She called for greater international cooperation and partnerships to promote and protect the rights of children, and for the global community to remain resolute in efforts to create a world fit for children.

CHARLES T. NTWAAGAE (Botswana), associating himself with SADC, noted that his country had achieved significant progress in the protection of children's rights. The legislative and policy environment for the protection of children had improved over the years, particularly with the passage of the Children's Act in 2009. Botswana had made substantial investments in the areas of health infrastructure and access to health-care services. Over the years, there had been an increase in the coverage of maternal and child health interventions, such as immunization, antenatal and postnatal care, supplementary feeding and the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS. Yet, Botswana continued to face financial and human resources constraints, he said, stressing the need to strengthen partnerships with the United Nations and development partners.

AMIRADALI (Tunisia) said that, in a world with unprecedented technological and economic possibilities, it was unacceptable that more than 100 million children under the age of five were underweight and that 2.5 million children died each of year as a result of malnutrition. Having children's well-being at the heart of its agenda, Tunisia had paid special attention to teaching and education. Great efforts had been undertaken to accomplish universal education, she continued. Furthermore, by including youth in decision-making processes, her country ensured that the group's political and civil rights were respected. The international community should devote greater consideration to illegal

migrant children and youth, as well as to the situation of Palestinian children, who were deprived of their fundamental rights and traumatized on a daily basis by fear, she concluded.

FRANCISCO CORTORREAL (Dominican Republic), associating himself with the Group of 77 and CELAC, said that his country had signed a collaboration agreement with UNICEF relating to his country's working plan 2012 to 2016, which had been developed to accelerate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Strategies like the "Solidarity Programme" and the "Quisqueya without Misery" targeted children by supporting income generation within families in poverty and promoting the development of skills and opportunities in vulnerable communities. He noted that comprehensive care, education and rehabilitation for children with Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and other conditions would be provided through a centre for disability care. The Dominican Republic had paid special attention to the issue of violence against children and adolescents adopting, inter alia, the Code for the Protection of the Fundamental Rights of Children and Adolescents, and hosting, in 2011, the Central American meeting on the follow-up to the United Nations Study on Violence against Children and Adolescents.

SANJA ZOGRAFSKA-KRSTESKA (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), associating herself with the European Union Delegation, said human capital was a power that moved societies through different stages of development and an important asset for every country. There were prosperous countries that were not rich in natural resources, but there was no prosperous country without human capital. Children and youth were potential human capital. Solid legislation, good education, proper health care and social protection shaped the future of children. Her country had incorporated those areas into its national action plan for children rights. To understand deficiencies in child protection in Member States, a continuous collection of relevant data was crucial, as was analysis of existing and emerging trends. She then discussed the establishment of national data collection systems, as well as specific juvenile justice laws intended to prevent sexual abuse and paedophilia.

CHITSAKA CHIPAZIWA (Zimbabwe), associating himself with SADC, stressed that his country complied with the various international and regional instruments on the rights and protection of children and had put in place various policies, legislative measures and programmes at the national level. The National Child Survival Strategy for 2010-2015 brought together all national stakeholders under a common framework. The National Programme of Action for Children was the overarching body coordinating child welfare services. Zimbabwe deplored trafficking in children and all other forms of economic and sexual exploitation of them. The country had taken the step to accede to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in February 2012. SADC would table a biannual resolution on the girl child, which would address the issue of households headed by children — a cause of great concern for his Government.

CHRISTOPHER GRIMA (Malta), aligning himself with the European Union Delegation, reported that the National Commission for Child Policy and Strategy had been set up in June by the Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity. The Commission was charged with developing a child-rights based strategy and policy for children. It was also tasked with drafting a children's act and policy. The Commissioner was expected to be given greater power to implement decisions. With the rise in recent years in the percentage of children at risk for poverty and social exclusion, Malta recognized the long-term economic benefits of social investment in children's well-being and was therefore adopting an approach focused on prevention and early intervention, which were the key to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Beginning 1 January, maternity leave had been increased from 16 weeks to 18.

ZWELETHU MNISI (Swaziland), associating himself with SADC, said a National Children's Policy was implemented in 2009 to ensure appropriate interventions for the protection of children and to especially strengthen initiatives focused on girls. Though the family is the natural and fundamental core component of society, free primary education for all children in public schools had been provided in accordance to the Constitution. But the implementation of the provision is a process and not an event. The allocation of funds to meet the education cost of orphans and other vulnerable children had also been increased. However, the traditional extended family, which had been a long-term safety net for orphaned children, is under strain due to the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. And sexual

exploitation, sex trafficking, child slavery and paedophilia, especially for girls, had heightened as the Internet had become more mainstream.

ANDREJ LOGAR (Slovenia), also speaking on behalf of Austria and Croatia, aligned himself with the European Union Delegation. He said that despite progress, children still suffered from poverty, armed conflict, and natural and man-made disasters. Children living in conflict areas faced grave threats to their safety and human rights, as underlined in reports from Syria, Mali and the Central African Republic. Those conflicts would have lasting consequences on their populations, including the loss of generations of people. Children were often denied their right to the education that gave them the opportunity to become responsible citizens. Slovenia, Austria and Croatia would continue focusing on this area as it was crucial for sustainable development.

BAKHITA SELMA MANSOURI (Algeria) said that poor children continued to face the brunt of the economic crisis, particularly as it had increased food prices. Among the world's children, African youth were those most affected by undernourishment, diseases, illiteracy, poverty and armed conflicts, she continued. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child showed the importance that African States gave to the issue. However, Africa alone could not address all the challenges, for lack of means rather than lack of will. The support of the international community was, therefore, not only necessary but also urgent. Algeria had adopted laws to align itself with the provisions of the international instruments on children's rights. It had also implemented a national strategy for families, a national plan for the protection of childhood (2008-2015) and a national strategy to combat violence against children in cooperation with UNICEF. Algeria was relentless in its fight against child labour, child prostitution and all forms of human trafficking.

MARIO ROGERIO BAPTISTA VON HAFF (Angola), aligning himself with SADC, said due to its many complexities, tackling child poverty remained one of the biggest obstacles to the protection and promotion of the rights of the child. Poverty not only affected the lives of children, but it also had a negative impact on children's right to participation in society and to their protection from violence and exploitation. Angola had intensified efforts to include the rights of children in its national development plans and policies. Such plans, however, needed adequate and consistent resource commitments. His Government had established the Angolan National Committee on Children, as well as a national action plan to combat child sexual exploitation and trafficking. As part of its efforts to address child malnutrition, Angola had signed an agreement with UNICEF, which had benefited more than 250,000 youth.

ULZIIBAYAR VANGANSUREN (Mongolia) said that 37 per cent of its population were children and 29.8 per cent of them lived in poverty. She noted that poverty, social disparity and unemployment exacerbated by continuing migration from rural to urban areas seriously affected the rights of children to decent living conditions. The result was often a host of issues including malnutrition, mental disorder and greater susceptibility to crime and exploitation. The Government had been taking measures to improve the rights of children, especially in the areas of education and health services. "Children are symbols of our future, but their rights should not be symbolic," she said.

The representative of Costa Rica, associating herself with CELAC, reiterated that chronic poverty was the biggest hindrance to protecting children and fulfilling their rights. Children needed to be at the core of measures for tackling poverty and promoting development. Indigenous and migrant children and those of African descent or with disabilities were further impacted by poverty, social and economic inequalities and climate change, she said. To break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and social exclusion, it was imperative to improve a non-discriminatory access to public services for children, particularly education. In this context, her country had launched a programme aimed at promoting school retention, as well as a culture of peace. Investing in child education was crucial in making them actors of change and promoters of a new paradigm of sustainable development. Her country had hosted the Global Youth Summit, at which the Costa Rica Declaration had been adopted, which included ideas that could be integrated into the post-2015 development agenda.

DHAMMIKA SEMASINGHE (Sri Lanka) highlighted that the children of Sri Lanka grew up in a

comparatively benevolent socioeconomic environment. The success of its policies and programmes for children was due largely to the continued focus on service delivery to rural areas, where the majority of the population resided. A well-developed rural family health-care system, combined with the traditional knowledge of mothers and midwives on maternal health, had contributed to a low infant and maternal mortality rates — only 9.4 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2012 for the former and 35 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010 for the latter. And 98 per cent of births in the country took place in health-care facilities, and birth registration was over 92 per cent. Maternity leave was generous with 84 days of paid leave, followed by another 84 of half-paid leave.

The representative of Lebanon highlighted that her Government aimed to protect the rights of all children in her country, where half of them were Syrian and Palestinian children who sought safe refuge in Lebanon. Her country was seeking to build an open, pluralistic society. Her Government was fulfilling international obligations by endorsing and implementing the Children's Rights Convention and its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and a set of ILO instruments related to child labour. It was undertaking national campaigns that included goals of stemming school dropouts, particularly in rural areas, and combating sexual abuse. The remaining challenges were putting Lebanon to the test, she said, calling on the international community to support the 1.5 million Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, most of them children. Pledges were still falling short of the real humanitarian needs in Lebanon. The country had known all too well the bitterness of occupation and conflict from its own experience, she said, noting that children were the primary victims.

MILORAD ŠĆEPANOVIĆ (Montenegro), associating himself with the European Union Delegation, said that his country's criminal code addressed and condemned sexual abuse, trafficking and forced marriage involving children. It also had established a new national action plan for children. Many of the country's Ministries had launched the first national child protection database with a view of providing reliable data on the topic. Particular attention had been paid to children with disabilities and those without parental care. In this respect in the last three years, a UNICEF-supported campaign, entitled "It's about ability", had largely contributed to changing attitudes and practices towards children with disabilities. In the area of juvenile justice, Montenegro was recognized as a leader in the region in applying victim-offender mediation for youth, he added.

The representative of Peru, associating herself with CELAC and the Group of 77, said that her country had taken initiatives aimed at improving the lives of children. In 2012, the National Plan of Action for Childhood 2012-2021 had been approved, which led the way into the following decade for the comprehensive support of Peruvian girls, boys and adolescents. Further, the second Sunday of April had been marked to annually observe the "Day of the Peruvian Child". Among the institutions dealing specifically with children was a national board on childhood and youth. The national programme, Yachay, was also launched with the aim of providing assistance to street children. Peru had also paid special attention to rural children. To address another issue that severely impacted youth, the Government had adopted the National Strategy for the Prevention and Eradication of Work Labour 2012-2021.

DO HUNG VIET (Viet Nam), aligning himself with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), noted that his country had enacted legislation, created mechanisms and taken measures to ensure that all children were treated equally and their rights protected. Viet Nam had incorporated the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into its national legislation, creating a solid legal framework for the creation of equal opportunity for all children. The 2013 initiative "Action Month for Children" had particularly focused on "creating equal development opportunities for poor and ethnic minority children". Another project was being implemented to support orphans, homeless children, children living with HIV/AIDS, children with disabilities and those affected by natural disasters. The participation of children themselves was critical. The Millennium Development Goals on education, child mortality and gender equality had been achieved, and the remaining ones should be completed by 2015.

FRANCIS CHULLIKATT, Permanent Observer for the Holy See, stressed that the Children's

Rights Convention accorded children with the right to both prenatal and postnatal healthcare. That provision had meaning only if the unborn baby was first afforded the right to life and survival. Prenatal diagnosis undertaken for the purpose of deciding whether or not the baby would be permitted to be born was inconsistent with the Convention. Regarding the recent output of the Committee on the Rights of Child, his delegation urged the body to revise its General Comments that did not constitute agreed language, such as "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" in conformity with its guiding international instruments. Recommendations related to "safe" abortion were reprehensible. He said that no abortion was ever "safe" because it killed the life of the child and harmed the mother.

KYAW THU NYEIN (Myanmar), aligning himself with ASEAN, noted that traditionally children in his country were treasured as "jewels of the family". To promote access to education for all children, free and compulsory primary education had been introduced since the 2011-2012 academic year. In addition, primary school children were provided textbooks free of charge. Human rights education had been introduced in the school curriculum in the 2004-2005 academic year. All girls and boys had equal rights in pursuing an education from grade school through higher education. The ratio of girls to boys was steadily rising. To provide better health care to children, the Government had implemented the 2006-2015 National Plan of Action for Children, which focused on nutrition, water and sanitation, among other things. In June 2012, the Government had signed an action plan with the United Nations Country Team to end the recruitment and use of underage children by armed forces. Since the signing, there had been no more cases of new recruitments of underage children in the military, and systematic screenings were being carried out at recruitment centres.

TAMTA KUPRADZE (Georgia), associating herself with the European Union Delegation, noted that her country was a signatory to the Child Rights Convention and its two optional protocols. She drew attention to incidents illustrating the implications of illegal occupation on children. She said that on 23 May, in the Gali district of the occupied Abkhazia, special forces of the Sokhumi occupation regime had intruded into schools with Georgian-language classes, confiscating textbooks and computers. There had been cases of ethnically targeted violence against children in the occupied regions. The Russian military stationed along the occupation line had not allowed schoolchildren of Georgian ethnicity from the Gali district to cross the occupation line to attend classes on the Georgian-controlled territory, thus coercing them to go to the Russian-language school. In November 2012, the parents of a sick child from the district had been detained on the occupation line. As a result, the child later died.

CECILE MBALLA EYENGA (Cameroon) said that when dealing with the protection of children, special attention should be given to girls because they were often at greater risk to be confronted with discrimination than boys. For that reason, the Cameroonian Government had adopted a number of measures to encourage the well-being of female children. This included launching awareness-raising programmes with parents and communities aimed at promoting equal participation of boys and girls in the access to education. With the same spirit, policies had been implemented to promote participation of girls to higher education and employment. On another topic, she said that Cameroon had in place a zero-tolerance policy for female genital mutilation. The practice was dramatically decreasing in the country and it concerned less than 1 per cent of the population. The Government had developed a plan to combat it by establishing, among other things, 16 local committees and providing them with financial support and assisting "practitioners" to identify alternatives to it. Cameroon was aware that the protection of children's rights became even more pressing in emergency situations. For that reason, it had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict in May 2012.

The representative of Rwanda said that the National Policy for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children had identified the following categories of vulnerable children: those in child-headed households and in foster care; street children; those in conflict with the law; children with disabilities; those sexually exploited or abused; working children; those affected by HIV/AIDS; those displaced; and those under the care of single mothers. In addition, the Government had set up a National Commission for the Child Rights to coordinate all activities related to promoting and protecting children's rights. Annual summits for children had been held since 2004, offering representatives of children an opportunity to

discuss issues with senior officials, including the Head of State, cabinet ministers and parliamentarians. Rwanda was breaking the barriers that prevented children from attending primary education by abolishing school fees and constructing more classrooms in villages. The rate of pupils enrolled in secondary schools increased from 45 per cent in 2003 to 88 per cent in 2008.

AMIRA FAHMY (Egypt) stressed that the importance of putting the status of children at the core of the post-2015 development agenda. Education was both an international obligation and a fundamental right that must be realized for all children. Last week, the United Nations had marked the second International Day of the Girl Child by calling for innovation to get more girls in schools and improve the quality of learning for all children. That approach should include mentorship programmes to help children acquire critical work and leadership skills and facilitate their transition from school to adulthood, including deploying mobile education technology to reach those in remote areas in developing countries. There was a need for strengthening strategic partnerships among Governments, regional organizations and the United Nations special procedures mandate-holders. Her delegation strongly condemned the involvement of children in armed conflicts either as combatants or exploited victims

The representative of Libya, associating himself with the Group of 77 and the African Group, said that his Government had endorsed the Children's Rights Convention and its optional protocols. Despite those international instruments and efforts undertaken by UNICEF and other international organizations and non-governmental organizations to create a safe environment for children, many challenges remained. Under the former regime, children did not enjoy the rights guaranteed by law, such as the right to education and health care. When a conflict had erupted, children under the age of 18 had been recruited into the military, tempted by money. As a result, many had died and others had lost their limbs and/or were experiencing psychological trauma from violence in conflict. "Libya is trying to turn a page," he said, stressing that measures had been taken in partnership with the United Nations mission and other stakeholders to establish the rule of law and create new school curricula. The Government had supported efforts to incorporate the rights of children into national development plans.

The representative of Oman said that children across the globe suffered as a result of ignorance and were deprived of opportunities due to conflict. Viewing the rights of children as an integral part of human development, his Government had endorsed the Children's Rights Convention and its two Optional Protocols. A national children's rights bill was in the final stage of passage. He also underscored the importance of non-governmental organizations, recognizing that 56 civil society entities delivered services throughout the vast territory of the country, in cooperation with Government ministries and agencies. The Government had undertaken awareness-raising campaigns in partnership with the Ministry of Education, the media and other stakeholders. When addressing humanitarian needs, transparency was critical.

YOUSOUFOU BAMBA (Côte d'Ivoire), associating himself with the Group of 77 and the African Group, said that in certain regions of the world a reason of concern was the "non-identification" of children at birth. Further, in daily life children were subjected to rape, kidnapping, sale, trafficking, exploitation, prostitution and recruitment in armed forces. In the face of these challenges, it was difficult for his delegation to understand why priority should be given to the sexual and reproductive rights of children, as there were more basic rights that first needed to be addressed. National legislation in his country condemned abortion, as the respect of human life was at the centre of his country's policies. For this same reason, the death penalty had been abolished, he added. In the period following the electoral crisis of 2010-2011, many strides had been made in the field of health, education, protection against child trafficking and work labour, among other things, he continued. The access of children to health services was particularly crucial for his Government, noting that a new hospital specializing in maternal and child care was under construction. Working side by side with the several medical centres where child immunization was carried out and care for HIV/AIDS and malaria was provided, among other things, the new facility was to contribute to reducing maternal, neonatal, child and youth mortality and morbidity.

ABULKALAM ABDUL MOMEN (Bangladesh) noted that global progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals had been slow and uneven, as many children in poorer areas were still lacking basic health care, education and opportunities, and many more were still dying of preventable causes. At the national level, the rights of the children were guaranteed by the Constitution as the Government recognized the value of nurturing children, who would become effective human capital for the future. The rights of children would be best achieved through ensuring access to education and health-care services, he underlined. However, the modest national led efforts of developing countries needed to be supported by their development partners. Efforts to ensure the rights of children should also focus on poverty eradication and more family-centred policies, he concluded.

PASCALINE GERENGBO YAKIVU (Democratic Republic of the Congo), associating herself with the Group of 77, the African Group and SADC, said that on 16 June every year her country observed the Day of the African Child. In 2009, the Democratic Republic of the Congo had adopted a national action plan for orphans and vulnerable children, and a national strategy to combat maternal and child mortality. It was implementing a campaign to register children at birth. Under the Constitution, primary education was mandatory and free. In this context, the Government had taken several steps to ensure equality for girls and boys. She condemned the use of children by armed groups such as the M23 and others in the eastern part of the country. As a consequence of the conflict in that region, 6,500 million children were suffering from malnutrition. The Democratic Republic of the Congo had, therefore, signed an action plan with the United Nations to combat the recruitment of children and was collaborating with UNICEF to help children leave armed groups.

The representative of Azerbaijan noted that his Government had undertaken consistent efforts to bring the national legislation in line with the relevant international instruments. His country had also made tremendous strides in meeting the needs of refugee and internally displaced children, and strongly and consistently supported international efforts aimed at protecting children affected by armed conflict. For that reason his country was a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and two of its Optional Protocols, and to the relevant ILO conventions dealing with child labour.

SEMERE AZAZI (Eritrea) underlined the country's commitment towards improving the situation of children, respecting their basic rights and promoting their welfare. He highlighted the country's success in reducing the mortality rate of those under the age by 57.4 per cent. Controlling diseases that affected children and mothers, such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, had also been helpful in the survival and well-being of children, he said. The reduction of mortality rate wasn't only attributed to better access to primary healthcare, but to other measures taken to reduce poverty through sustained economic growth and nutritional needs, through intensive food security strategies and other social protection schemes.

The representative of Ukraine, associating himself with the European Union Delegation, said that the Government undertook efforts to bring the national child protection legislation in full compliance with international and European standards by accessing relevant international treaties and adjusting and systematically reforming national laws on that matter. A number of State programmes, aimed at enhancing the protection of the children's rights, had been implemented in Ukraine on children's homelessness and neglect, family support, combating human trafficking and, reforming the system of institutions for orphans and children deprived of parental care. There had been an increase in the number of such children being adopted by Ukrainian citizens in foster families and family-type homes. A presidential decree designated 2013 the Year of Children's Art. The initiative aimed to encourage creative, intellectual, spiritual and physical development of children.

The representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), said that children suffered immensely in armed conflicts, as they were made victims of, witnesses to and participants in atrocities, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, which they were sometimes forced to perpetrate against their own families and communities. Boys and girls who are unlawfully recruited, used in hostilities, or otherwise associated with armed forces or armed groups, were especially vulnerable because they were often imprisoned, wounded or killed. Most suffering endured by children during armed conflicts could be prevented or alleviated if there was greater respect for existing

international law. The International Committee worked on preventing the recruitment and use of children, as well as on their return and reintegration into family and community life, and called on States to respect and scrupulously implement existing international laws.

MICHELE KLEIN SOLOMON, a representative of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), said that either accompanied or unaccompanied, millions of children were migrating across borders or within their own countries every year. IOM was troubled by the reported increase in child trafficking and noted that child migrants were easy prey to traffickers. To reverse this trend, she called on States to intensify capacity-building and training of all relevant stakeholders, including immigration officers, border officials, the police and labour inspectors. Turning to children affected and displaced by humanitarian crises and armed conflicts, she noted that cross-border recruitment of children had become a common trait in many conflict situations and called for effective cross-border coordination. Unaccompanied migrant children without parental care and often lacking legal status were less able to assert their basic rights. An increased effort by all was needed to close both legal and practical gaps in the protection of children.

HREINN LINDAL, observer of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, underlined that a child was most at risk of dying during their first 28 days of life, and this accounted for 40 per cent of all deaths among children under the age of 5. Half of newborn deaths occurred during the first 24 hours and 75 per cent during the first week of life due to preterm birth, severe infection and asphyxia. "For this reason, access to neonatal care and safe birthing facilities is of the utmost importance to children," he said. The Order ran neonatal health centres around the world, as well as developed programmes for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. In conclusion, he reaffirmed that children represented the future and it was the world community's responsibility to ensure their health and safe development.

KEVIN CASSIDY of the International Labour Organization said that protecting the rights of children had been an integral part of their work since its inception. The ILO International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour had activities and projects in 90 countries, he continued, providing technical support and raising awareness in States at very different stages in their response to child labour. To mark this year's World Day against Child Labour, ILO had published a report, entitled "Ending child labour in domestic work", which outlined the abuses suffered by millions of children working in family homes. Unfortunately, child domestic work was currently not recognized as a form of child labour in many countries because of the blurred relationship with the employing family, he noted. Another initiative had been the Child Labour Platform, launched to help the private sector identify and tackle obstacles they faced in honouring their commitment to eliminate child labour. Furthermore, the recent Third Global Conference on Child Labour showed the ongoing commitment of States, employers, non-governmental and international organizations and civil society to eradicate the worst forms of child labour by 2016.

Right of Reply

Speaking in exercise of the right of reply, a representative of Israel said that her Palestinian counterpart continued to spread lies and misused the Third Committee. Messages of incitement were everywhere. Palestine was using children as suicide bombers against Israel. The Committee had more important work to do than hearing Palestinians' false accusations of Israel.

A representative of Saudi Arabia said she was rebutting false accusations made by the delegation of Syria. Regarding the religious decree, the Syrian delegate should cease to make the reference unless she had confirmed reports. Instead, the Syrian delegation should focus on dealing with the atrocities committed against its own population, including women and children.

An observer from the State of Palestine rebutted the remarks just made by Israel's representative as typical of an occupying Power. Israel continued its human rights violations against Palestinians, including children. Countless reports documented a long list of violations by the occupying Power and Israel had ignored a number of resolutions that had been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. The only solution was for Israel to end its occupation and violations.

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