

Joint Statement on behalf of 60¹ Member States of the Group of Friends of Children and SDGs at the 2018 Meeting of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF)

Mr/Ms Chair,

I would like to begin by sharing some inspiring words from a young woman named Zubaida Bello -- student, poet and social justice activist from Brooklyn, New York:

“I try to encourage people to speak up. I feel like a lot of young people don’t do anything because they don’t think they have anything to offer. *But that’s their first mistake.* With poetry, I speak about important issues and because I let other people feel my words and their power, I’ve been able to spark change. There’s no such thing as ‘big’ or ‘little’ activism...as long as you’re doing something, you have an influence on this earth and it is valued.”

Zubaida’s words remind us of our intentions when we adopted the SDGs at the United Nations three years ago – that this is an “agenda of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

Therefore, we must empower and enlist the support of people around the world in order to achieve the SDGs. This begins with our youngest citizens...And their contributions – no matter how small – can add up to extraordinary and lasting change - not only for themselves but for their entire communities.

The theme for this year’s HLPF is *Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies*. Investing in human capital is the foundation for this, which begins with *investing in children* – both girls and boys -- starting in the earliest years, and following through into the second decade of life.

Such investments benefit each of these individual young people, allowing them to realize their full human potential, which is their right. However, this is also a pragmatic issue: investing in children and young people is also an investment in a society’s inclusive economic growth; their cleaner and more sustainable environment; the safety and stability of their communities and countries; the strength of their public institutions; and the vibrancy of their private sector.

As Members of the Group of Friends of Children, 17 of us are reporting on our SDG implementation efforts through our Voluntary National Review this year, and already 6 of our Group Members have volunteered for 2019.

¹ Andorra, Armenia, Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Croatia, Dominican Republic (observer), Denmark, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Lesotho, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Panama, Pakistan, Peru, Qatar, Romania, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uganda, United Kingdom, Uruguay.

We are committed to improving the lives of children and young people through our own local and national SDG implementation efforts and we would like to encourage fellow Member States to do the same, specifically: creating or scaling up opportunities for children and young people to learn about and take action on the SDGs; and for governments to solicit and use the voices and views of their youngest constituents in decision-making processes.

We also know that a first step in being able to realize the rights of every child is to understand who they are, where they live, what they need and what resources are being allocated. This is especially critical for children that have been marginalized or left behind.

According to a recent report by UNICEF, over half a billion children are 'unaccounted' globally -- which means there is not sufficient, comparable or timely data to track progress on their well-being. Without data on these unaccounted-for children, we will not fulfill our commitments to "leave no one behind." Therefore, investing in tools and systems to better track progress and provide the data we need, when we need it, will be essential. In addition to improving the quality of data on children themselves, we also need to improve our tracking of social spending on interventions and programs critical to improving their lives.

To conclude, the coming year is a particularly critical one: it is a year of stock-taking and reflection on the SDGs: whereby the High-Level Political Forum will be convened twice for the first time under the auspices of both the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

2019 is also the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. We see these occasions as a strategic opportunity for a global re-commitment to children's rights in the 21st century -- critically linked to our implementation and monitoring of the SDGs -- and underpinned by local, national and global action, working for and with all children.

Thank you.