



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 2412th meeting*

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Chair: Mr. Pedernera Reyna

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* No summary records were issued for the 2409th to 2411th meetings.

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention

Opening statements

1. **The Chair** said that it was a pleasure for him to open the event organized to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention. The Convention was a milestone in the history of the United Nations. The fact that it had been ratified by so many Member States – more than had ratified any other United Nations treaty – attested to their particular sensitivity to the conditions in which children lived. However, 30 years after the Convention’s adoption there were still major challenges, and the aspirations behind each ratification had still to be transformed into specific actions to enhance the lives of children and their families.

2. In opening the event, he wished to share with those present two contrasting notions of utopia that might be applied to their efforts to achieve an ideal society in which children’s rights were protected, respected and upheld. For Walter Benjamin, the notion of utopia was a negative force that brought to light ideas and practices that should no longer have a place. Applying that notion to work in the field of children’s right, it was clear that some ideas and practices were so misplaced that they no longer merited discussion. His fellow Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano, on the other hand, perceived utopia as a positive force, as the sun on the horizon that drew everyone towards its light but could never be reached. Applying that notion to children’s rights, it was clear that, although the ideal might never be achieved, it was the pursuit that mattered.

3. To continue the welcoming address, he was honoured to introduce Serena, a 17-year-old student and active campaigner against climate change from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland who had led campaigns as a member of the Children’s Human Rights Network of Amnesty International. Serena believed that failing to combat climate change was a violation of children’s rights, including their right to life, to health and to an adequate standard of living.

4. **Serena** said that, although she was a human rights activist, she was technically still a child. For that reason and others, she was grateful for the existence of the Convention. She wished to highlight that everyone, not just adults, enjoyed the rights enshrined in article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which included the right to universal and equal suffrage. With that observation in mind, she wondered why she could not vote: was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in fact not universal and were children not human beings?

5. It was all too easy for adults to dismiss, ignore or undermine children. The Convention was a rare product of efforts by older generations to ensure that the best interests of the child were a primary consideration in all actions concerning children, rather than, as had too frequently been the case, not being given any consideration at all. The adult world was generally a place of war, poverty and growing inequality: it was clear, therefore, that the best interests of the child had not been a primary consideration when world leaders had made their choices.

6. The polar ice caps were melting; the world was warming; and carbon emissions were on the rise. Solving those problems was in the best interests of the world’s children, but there were other priorities. That situation underscored the need to realize the ideals set out in the Convention. The best interests of the child should be a primary consideration even when they conflicted with the best interests of adults. Making such a change would be difficult, however, as suggested by the dismissive tone adults habitually took with children. They often said, for example, “you’ll understand when you’re older”, “you should be in school so you can learn how to solve all the problems you’re worried about” or “you can talk when you’ve been doing this as long as I have”. Even approving comments were dismissive. Who, for example, had not heard an adult marvelling at the innocent way children viewed the world?

7. She wished to highlight, however, that panic over a warming world and objections to prioritizing profit over people were not naive. She wanted her voice heard. The rights

enshrined by the Convention should be made real, and it should be possible to complain when they were violated. It was in part for that reason that she had taken part in a wide-ranging campaign to urge the Government of the United Kingdom to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on a communications procedure. Other States should also ratify the Protocol. The time had come to deliver on the promise of the rights of the child and ensure that children themselves defined their best interests.

Panel discussion I: 30 years of the Convention

8. **The Chair** invited Ms. Skelton to moderate the discussion.
9. **Ms. Skelton** said that the first part of the afternoon's event would take the form of a talk show looking at the first 30 years of the Convention. The talk show would be hosted by Sophia and Keren, two young reporters who were high school students in Geneva. Mr. Jean Zermatten, a former Committee member and juvenile judge, would first set the stage with a brief overview of the Convention's history.
10. **Mr. Zermatten**, accompanying his statement with a digital slide presentation, said that the Convention had three non-binding precursors: the Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child of 1924, drafted by Eglantyne Jebb, founder of Save the Children, and adopted by the League of Nations in the wake of the First World War; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948; and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1959. The adoption of the Convention, in 1989, had been spearheaded by Poland, drawing on the ideas of the educator Janusz Korczak, and had been preceded by around ten years of work. Within roughly a year of its adoption, the Convention had entered into force. It had since been complemented by three Optional Protocols, the most recent of which was the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure, adopted in 2011. That Protocol had been ratified by 45 States, which was significantly fewer than had ratified the Convention and the two earlier Protocols, namely, the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.
11. The Committee responsible for examining States parties' efforts to implement the Convention currently had 18 members, up from 10 in 1991, when it had first been constituted. Ten of the current 18 members were men, although in previous years the Committee had had an even gender balance, and 7 were from Africa, the remaining 11 providing more or less even representation of the world's other regions.
12. Civil society had participated in the work of the Committee from the outset, for example, by submitting shadow reports in advance of the Committee's dialogues with States parties. From 1999, when children had first taken part in pre-sessional meetings, to 2018, when children had spoken at the day of general discussion on protecting and empowering children as human rights defenders, children's involvement in and contribution to the Committee's work had expanded at an ever-increasing rate.
13. **Ms. Skelton** said that the two reporters, Keren and Sophia, would be putting questions to Mr. Paulo David, who would comment on the Convention from the perspective of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), having been the Secretary of the Committee from 1995 to 2005; Mr. Philippe Cori, who would provide insight into the role played by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); and Mr. Alex Conte, who would discuss the role of Child Rights Connect, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that was one of the Committee's key partners.
14. **Keren** said that she and her fellow reporter Sophia had previously produced a documentary about the juvenile justice system in Geneva, for which they had conducted several interviews. It was that project that had sparked their interest in children's rights.
15. **Sophia** asked what had struck Mr. Zermatten most forcefully about the way children had been seen and treated in his career as a juvenile judge.
16. **Mr. Zermatten** said that more than 40 years earlier, when he had begun working in the juvenile justice system, children in conflict with the law had been considered dangerous. They had thus been subjected to repressive measures. Switzerland had never imprisoned large numbers of children, but it had not hesitated to place them in often large

institutions where they had been deprived of their liberty with little regard for their families, their education or their rehabilitation.

17. **Sophia** asked which UNICEF-led projects, in Mr. Cori's view, best demonstrated its contributions to children's rights and the implementation of the Convention.

18. **Mr. Cori** (United Nations Children's Fund) said that the World Summit for Children, held in 1990, had led to national action plans in health, education, protection and nutrition being adopted in countries the world over. As a result, child mortality was less than half what it had been 30 years earlier; immunization, despite a hiccup or two, had become a best practice; nutrition had improved, as evidenced by the marked reduction in the number of children with stunted growth; and millions more children were now attending school. In addition, far fewer children married, and rates of mother-to-child transmission of HIV had fallen.

19. **Keren**, noting that Mr. David had written a critical review of human rights in youth sports, asked what had drawn his attention to that particular topic.

20. **Mr. David** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that he had always been interested in sports. In the early 1990s, when he had begun working in the field of children's rights, it had been clear that many practices in the sporting world constituted violations of children's rights. Sports, the assumption had been, could only be good; criticism had been viewed as tantamount to a desire to destroy the sports system. Sports, and those regulated by federations in particular, had also been considered above the law. The Convention, it had been believed, did not apply to them. Introducing children's rights into the sports world had thus been difficult.

21. Millions of children were involved in sporting activities, and for the most part those activities were beneficial. Nonetheless, sports and other authorities still failed to give the Convention the consideration it was due, and some children involved in sports were at risk of violations of their rights. They were subjected to sexual abuse or other forms of violence by coaches or trainers or put under undue pressure to perform, including by being encouraged to take performance-enhancing drugs. Concussions were an additional threat to the well-being of children who played contact sports. Some children were even encouraged to drop out of school to focus on their sport. Gender-based discrimination and discrimination on grounds of disability also needed to be tackled.

22. Steps had been taken to combat abuses in competitive youth sports. The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), for example, had adopted stringent regulations to put an end to illegal transfers of young football players from Africa and Latin America to Europe and imposed harsh penalties on football clubs that disregarded the transfer regulations. Despite such steps, both States and sporting federations lacked solid frameworks for protecting and promoting the rights of children involved in sports. Some issues, such as the minimum age of participation in professional sports, were not taken seriously. Progress was slow, and at times it was hampered by political and financial imperatives. Countries leading the way included Sweden, which had adopted a policy of monitoring respect for children's rights within those sporting federations that received public funds, and also Canada, Australia and Ireland.

23. **Sophia** asked how Child Rights Connect had enhanced the participation of children in the implementation of the Convention.

24. **Mr. Conte** (Child Rights Connect) said that the promotion of meaningful, safe and effective child participation was a core component of his organization's work. As a global network of children's organizations, Child Rights Connect was in a unique position to analyse and develop that process. Two points should be emphasized in that regard. First, the process of empowering children to participate was a way of implementing the Convention. Second, child participation had the potential to transform and improve established processes. In 2018, Child Rights Connect had supported the Committee in developing working methods for child participation in its day of general discussion on empowering children as human rights defenders. More than 3,000 children had participated, and over half of the speakers and moderators had been children. The participation of children had made the event more inspiring, inclusive and accessible.

25. **Keren** asked whether all the States parties to the Convention had a juvenile justice system.

26. **Mr. Zermatten** said that it was possible to identify three distinct approaches towards juvenile justice among the States parties to the Convention. The first group of States parties, which consisted of around half of the total, had introduced specialized juvenile justice systems. They each had specially trained judges, a set of child-appropriate measures and penalties and separate rules of procedure. The second group, which consisted of around a quarter of States parties, had hybrid systems in which certain judges specialized in cases involving children and generally imposed child-appropriate measures and penalties. States parties belonging to the third group, which consisted of the remaining quarter, did not have a specialized juvenile justice system. In those States, children were tried in adult courts and were liable to the same measures and penalties as adults, albeit sometimes subject to proportional reductions. Those States parties tended to argue that they had insufficient funding to ensure an adequate geographical distribution of specialized judges, that it was impossible to provide the appropriate training for such judges and that children in conflict with the law should be punished for their actions.

27. He noted that around half a dozen States in the world continued to apply the death penalty to persons who had been aged under 18 years old at the time of their offence, which was a serious violation of human rights.

28. **Keren** said that she would like to know how Mr. Cori thought children's families could be better supported.

29. **Mr. Cori** (United Nations Children's Fund), recalling that one of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals was to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children, said that there was a need to counter the view still held in many families that corporal punishment was beneficial for children. It was estimated that 80 per cent of violence against children occurred in the family. Scientists had recently shown that violence against young children had a negative impact on brain development. It was also destructive to self-esteem. As violence against children was associated with economic and social inequalities among adults, the initiatives launched to combat it should be focused on improving social inclusion.

30. UNICEF supported numerous Governments in the implementation of social protection programmes with a view to improving outcomes for children. It was particularly important to work with families to address the unequal access of boys and girls to health care and education. In countries that lacked a functioning social security system, families sometimes prioritized the education of boys for financial reasons. Special efforts were required in some communities to promote secondary education for girls. There was also a need to raise awareness among families of the health benefits of breastfeeding.

31. **Sophia** asked what role OHCHR played in the implementation of the Convention.

32. **Mr. David** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that supporting the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child had been a learning process for OHCHR. In the early years of that process, there had been a tendency to downplay the importance of children's rights, and little emphasis had been placed on mainstreaming them across the human rights system as a whole. However, children's rights now featured prominently in all aspects of the work of OHCHR. Most United Nations agencies contributed to the protection of children's rights in one way or another.

33. Looking ahead, there was a need to work further on the realization of some of the specific rights enshrined in the Convention, such as the rights to freedom of association and freedom of religion. The limited OHCHR field presence in certain countries was an obstacle in that regard. OHCHR had a particular focus on protecting human rights defenders, including those who were victims of reprisals, and might one day be called upon to protect children's rights defenders.

34. The High Commissioner, Ms. Bachelet, was a paediatrician by training, which gave her a heightened sensitivity to children's rights issues. She had recently released a statement on the situation of migrant children detained at the border between Mexico and

the United States of America. OHCHR endeavoured to coordinate its work on children's rights with other United Nations agencies.

35. **Keren** asked how new technologies and social media could facilitate civil society participation.

36. **Mr. Conte** (Child Rights Connect) said that new technologies and social media had the potential to bring together children from all over the world. Online tools could also increase awareness and promote more effective civil society participation. Child Rights Connect had launched a website on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on a communications procedure, which was intended to raise awareness of that Optional Protocol as a tool for the protection of children's rights. Child Rights Connect called upon States parties to the Convention to ratify the third Optional Protocol if they had not already done so.

37. It was important to remember that some children, including many children in rural areas and those living in poverty, did not have access to the Internet. It was also important to recognize the need for safeguards to mitigate the risks associated with new technologies and social media. Child Rights Connect therefore welcomed the Committee's decision to prepare a general comment on children's rights in relation to the digital environment.

38. **Sophia** asked what had inspired those present at the meeting to work on children's rights issues.

39. **Ms. Aho Assouma** said that, at the age of 8 years old, she had become aware of the need to stand up for children in order to protect them from injustices of the kind that she had experienced.

40. **Mr. Madi** said that the children present at the meeting represented the future. It was possible to measure how civilized a society was by the emphasis that it placed on children's rights.

41. **Sophia** asked those in attendance how the Convention could be used to promote awareness of children's rights among children themselves.

42. **María**, a young children's rights activist, said that children who understood the rights enshrined in the Convention should strive to raise awareness of those rights among other children.

Launch of the child-friendly version of the Convention

43. **The Chair** invited Mr. Rodríguez Reyes to act as moderator.

44. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** said that he wished to invite Zcyrel and María, two highly experienced children's rights leaders, to present the child-friendly version of the Convention.

45. Zcyrel, a 17-year-old national of the Philippines, was a child leader who had been defending children's rights since the age of 13 years old. She was the president of a children's federation and, as a child representative, had contributed to the development of a national action plan for children. Zcyrel hoped that her community could become safer and more developed without losing its culture.

46. María, a 16-year-old national of Mexico, was currently working with young children as part of a movement known as "Confetti". She also formed part of a national network working in cooperation with UNICEF to combat violence against children and young people and taught a course on the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. She hoped to become a doctor and to help as many children as possible.

47. *The child-friendly version of the Convention was projected onto a screen at the front of the meeting room.*

48. **María** said that it was a great honour to be presenting the child-friendly version of the Convention. The thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention was an opportunity to take stock of three decades of work to promote and protect children's rights across the world.

49. **Zcyrel** said that she and María were two of the nine members of the Children's Advisory Team established by UNICEF and Child Rights Connect to inform the development of the child-friendly version of the Convention. The team had held consultations with other children in order to garner opinions on the accessibility of the Convention, which had been drafted by adults. As the holders of the rights enshrined in the Convention, children needed to be able to understand its provisions.

50. The child-friendly version of the Convention consisted of a series of colourful icons, each representing one of its articles.

51. **María** said that the icons were intended to be accessible to younger children. A dedicated platform had been made available to the Children's Advisory Team to enable its members to discuss how the Convention could be made easier for children to understand. The child-friendly version of the Convention was a tool with which children could defend their rights and the rights of other children. In her view, the most important provision of the Convention was article 6, on the right to life, survival and development. The participation of children in the preparation of the child-friendly version of the Convention was evidence of the implementation of article 12 on the right of children to express their views, article 13 on the right to freedom of expression and article 15 on the right to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

52. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** said that the child-friendly version of the Convention was an important achievement that would strengthen the protection of children's rights across the world.

Panel discussion 2: Current state of play and vision for the rights of the child

53. **The Chair** invited Mr. Jaffé to moderate the discussion.

54. **Mr. Jaffé** said that the panellists would address four distinct topics. He invited the speakers for the first topic, "child participation and children as human rights defenders", to take the floor.

55. **Zcyrel** said that she had been a child leader and a children's rights advocate since the age of 13 years old. In that capacity, she had worked with the Government of the Philippines to plan initiatives for children, including national children's conferences. She had been given a safe platform from which to express her views freely. Her formative experience as a child leader and children's rights advocate would not have been possible without the support of her family, the Government of the Philippines and her organization. The children of today needed the support of bodies such as the Committee in order to become the leaders of tomorrow.

56. **Ms. Otani**, addressing the children present, said that their voices mattered, and that child participation had a broad impact on all areas related to children's rights. The Committee appreciated the child advisors' inspiring ideas and passion. Recognition of children's participation as rights holders was increasing and a global movement of child human rights defenders was emerging. The Convention stated that children had the right to be heard on all matters affecting them, including schooling, health care, housing, freedom of expression, discrimination and climate change, so the Committee was changing its practices by consulting children. She had been encouraged to see so many child participants and speakers at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development that had taken place in New York in July 2019.

57. She invited those present to consider how the participation of children at the local, regional and international levels could be guaranteed, and how vulnerable children in particular could be given opportunities to participate. She was pleased to note that the child advisors attending the meeting were very active locally through their children's parliament and other forums. Connections between children's everyday activities and their participation at the global level were critical. The Committee was grateful for the work of NGOs and others who had worked to empower children. Citing the words of Nelson Mandela, who had said that the true character of society was revealed in how it treated its children, she emphasized that States, the Committee, the United Nations and all adults in general had a responsibility to take children seriously and make child participation real.

58. **Mr. Jaffé** invited the speakers for the second topic, “children’s rights in relation to the digital environment”, to take the floor.

59. **María** said that social media, the Internet and electronic media had removed barriers and allowed children to connect with each other, defend their own and others’ rights, find ways to improve their environment and infrastructure, learn more, acquire knowledge, and consult books and information sources only available in other countries. At the same time, action was needed to address the new risks that those technologies had created.

60. **Ms. Khazova** said that, unlike in the 1980s, when the Convention had been adopted, children now lived both online and offline. Nevertheless, 30 years on, the Convention fully covered all the issues that had emerged as a result of new technologies, since it recognized children’s right to access information, to freedom of expression and assembly, to privacy, to education, and to leisure and play activities as well as the need to protect them from risk and abuse. Even so, the digital environment had spawned a number of serious concerns and challenges for States, NGOs, businesses, parents, children’s workers and children, which demanded urgent attention: providing access to the benefits of the digital environment had to be balanced by the right of children to be protected against harm and risk.

61. The Committee’s current work on the general comment on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment was a continuation of the Committee’s 2014 day of general discussion on digital media and children’s rights, during which the child participants had expressed the view that access to digital media should be considered a fundamental right of children and that those who lacked access were effectively excluded in many ways.

62. **Mr. Jaffé** invited the speakers for the third topic, “child justice”, to take the floor.

63. **Sophia** said that when she and her fellow reporter, Keren, had interviewed various important stakeholders, including the president of the juvenile courts of Geneva, a juvenile detention centre worker and a support worker for children involved in legal proceedings, while making their documentary about juvenile justice in their local community, they had learned that when a child came into conflict with the law, the aim was to provide education and to treat the child as a person needing help, and not as an offender requiring punishment. She invited those present to visit the ChildRightsHub website, where their 10-minute documentary could be viewed.

64. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that justice was a very sensitive area. Efforts had always been made to keep children away from justice, but justice was there to protect children. The term “justice and children” had now been replaced with terms like “juvenile justice” and “youth justice”, that shift in language reflecting a greater understanding of the fact that children’s rights were human rights and children were subjects, not objects, of law. Noting that the term “children and justice” often conjured up the idea of children who had broken the law, she said that children were also victims, witnesses and persons exercising their rights.

65. Many of the core principles established in the Convention, including protection against discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development, and child participation, were of particular application to the area of child justice. Although the Convention was not the first instrument dealing with youth justice, it was the first legally binding text that placed States under an obligation to create a specialist justice system for children and guarantee certain fundamental legal safeguards. Thus, over the past 30 years, States parties had enacted copious new legislation in response to the Convention, most of them having introduced a minimum age of criminal responsibility and established a specialized system, staffed by specialized legal professionals, that was accessible to children and allowed them to be heard and represented and to speak in their own language.

66. Major challenges remained, nonetheless. Ten countries still used capital punishment for crimes committed by persons aged under 18, and many others still imposed life prison sentences. Some countries placed children sentenced to death on death row until they reached their eighteenth birthday, a practice that amounted to torture under both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention against Torture. Many systems

placed children in institutions or with foster families, separated them from their siblings, deprived them of their liberty through measures that had a name other than imprisonment, failed to separate children from adults in detention centres, and failed to separate vulnerable children from those who had committed a criminal offence.

67. Certain States that had not set a minimum age of criminal responsibility determined responsibility based on the child's capacity to form his or her own views, which led to discrimination in some countries, where the age might be lower for girls than for boys. The current trend towards lowering the age of criminal responsibility in response to public opinion following excess media coverage of violent acts was a matter of particular concern since it threatened the independence of the judiciary. The Committee had sought to assist States by revising its general comment No. 10 on children's rights in juvenile justice and disseminating the recent study on children deprived of liberty.

68. **Ms. Winter** said that States parties were often slow to make changes in response to the Convention, especially in the area of justice: the justice system was a State's last bastion of power and they were often reluctant to yield any of that power. As a result, issues identified thirty years ago, such as the need for judges to understand why a child had committed an offence before handing down a sentence, had still not been fully and satisfactorily resolved.

69. With regard to the view that children who had committed offences required education not punishment, she said that punishment was sometimes also necessary, but assistance could be provided both inside and outside detention facilities. However, punishment was certainly not necessary in cases of foolhardy conduct attributable to immaturity on the part of the perpetrator. Non-custodial solutions were therefore possible, provided that appropriate support programmes and assistance were available, but politicians had no interest in spending money on children as they did not have the right to vote.

70. A shift towards restorative justice, which did not need to be costly, was now taking place. Restorative justice programmes should encompass both the perpetrators and the victims and should be available to both boys and girls, even though girls were less likely to offend. Reparation did not need to be monetary. Without such programmes, offenders were likely to reoffend.

71. **Mr. Jaffé** invited the speakers for the fourth topic, "the climate crisis and the environment", to take the floor. He noted that the panel for that topic would include Hannah, a high school student who was a member of the Children's Parliament of Scotland.

72. **Mr. Nelson** said that he would urge any persons, including any world leaders, who did not believe that climate change and environmental degradation were real to visit his country, Samoa, where they would see communities, villages and islands that were sinking every day. They should also look at the devastation that atomic testing by superpowers over the past three decades had caused in the Pacific, where many islands could potentially remain radioactive for another 200 years. They might also visit the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Children were talking about those issues, and the young Swedish environmental activist, Greta Thunberg, would shortly be delivering a speech before the United Nations in New York. Although the Committee was now listening, and had introduced a special section on climate change in its concluding observations, it was still struggling to relay the message to States. One State party had recently claimed that the Convention made no mention of a right to a clean environment, yet the state of the environment directly affected rights such as the right to health and the right to an adequate standard of living, and, under article 4 of the Convention, States parties had a duty to implement all the rights enshrined therein.

73. **Hannah** said that, besides being part of the Children's Parliament in Scotland, she had been a member of the Child Rights Connect global Children's Advisory Team in 2018. She had first become involved in promoting children's rights during an environmental improvement project in her home town of Tranent, in which 16 children had produced a mural reflecting the thoughts of 250 children about their community.

74. **Mr. Nelson** said that he had seen the mural, in which the children's vision of the future included electric cars made from recycled metal and plastics and more green spaces.

75. **Hannah** said that the children had wanted to make their town more eco-friendly and welcoming not only to the public but also to wildlife. They wanted more greenery and flowers and better places to play. Since then, they had won the “Keep Scotland Beautiful” award with their project “The Blooming Belters”, which had involved Tranent locals planting flowers around town. Tranent also had a Youth Reference Group in which young people could express their opinions on their environment and the community. She had attended three Scottish Cabinet Meetings to present the “Streets Ahead Tranent” project and mural and talk about the environment.

76. **Mr. Nelson** said that the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland had recently confirmed that, as a result of children’s activism and initiatives, the Government of Scotland had finally agreed to enact comprehensive legislation on children’s rights.

77. **Hannah** said she would like to see more Youth Reference Groups formed throughout the world, since they gave children a voice and improved adults’ awareness of children’s hopes and desires for their surroundings.

78. **Mr. Nelson** said that whenever children came and talked to the Committee, one of the pressing issues they always brought up was that of climate change and environmental degradation.

79. **Mr. Jaffé** said that he looked forward to the day when the child representatives would be in charge. A revolution of sorts was under way, similar to the generational shift seen in 1968: children were seeking a power-sharing arrangement through which they could influence their future.

Questions and answers

80. **The Chair** invited Mr. Jaffé to moderate the questions and answers session.

81. **Ms. Shorey** (Amnesty International), after describing her involvement in efforts to persuade the United Kingdom to ratify the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure, said that she wished to know whether the Committee believed the Optional Protocol could be a useful tool for climate strikers and other children in their efforts to force their States to take action.

82. **Ms. Winter** said that she wished the Committee could involve more children directly in its work. Various constraints, such as those related to the United Nations working languages, unfortunately made that impossible. In addition, the Committee already had a backlog of over 100 communications under consideration, and there was no possibility of increasing its human resources.

83. **Mr. Nelson** said that the main issue was lack of time. Until the processes and instruments with which the Committee worked were streamlined, that would always be a problem.

84. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that once the United Kingdom had ratified the third Optional Protocol, it would be possible for British nationals to submit complaints concerning violations of children’s rights guaranteed under the Convention, including those arising from climate change.

85. **Mr. Jaffé** said that communications under the third Optional Protocol had already been received from a number of countries.

86. **Ms. Skelton** said that, while it was first necessary to exhaust domestic remedies, a carefully chosen case could be effective in those countries that had ratified the third Optional Protocol.

87. **Mr. Kikuchi-White** (SOS Children’s Villages International), after recalling a school event early in his life involving the abusive power of adults that had crushed his youthful ambitions, said that he would like to know young people’s views on what those who worked to support and empower children and to defend their rights were doing well work and where and how they could improve.

88. **Serena** said that it was important to let children and young people speak for themselves, and to listen to what they said. Rather than adults providing a voice for the

voiceless, they should simply pass on the microphone. A child's voice was just as important as that of an adult.

89. **Ms. Walton** (Amnesty International) said, with regard to the issue of children's participation and access to justice, that the United Kingdom had a particularly low age of criminal responsibility. Children as young as 8 could be deemed to be criminally responsible. Those 8-year-olds, however, had no means of expressing their views on any of the laws governing them since they did not have the right to vote. She wished to know the Committee's views on the possibility of granting suffrage to all human beings, including children.

90. **Mr. Jaffé** said that, in his view, everyone should have the right to vote, with a young child's vote being passed on to the parents if necessary, but that States, and adult society in general, had no desire to relinquish any of their power. Young people had to bring about that transfer of power. In May 1968, change had come about through universities; in 2019 the activism was coming from high schools.

91. **Sophia** said that she urged everyone, child or adult, to care more. It was important to not be afraid, to think critically and to question everything.

92. **Ms. Khazova** said that children should come to the Committee to raise the problems they experienced in their country in the run-up to the interactive dialogue with that State party. On those occasions when that had happened, she had learned a great deal from their eloquent explanations of the problems they faced.

93. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that raising the age of criminal responsibility, and thereby ensuring the child's right to effectively participate in judicial proceedings, was one of the core recommendations frequently made in the Committee's concluding observations. However, the right to participate and to be heard often clashed with cultural considerations, including in the transfer of power to young people. It was necessary to continue building on the 30 years of the Convention to ensure that mechanisms for real participation came to fruition.

94. **Ms. Ortega López** (Fundación Marista de Solidaridad Internacional) said that, in addition to ensuring restorative justice for young offenders, it was important to understand the factors that had driven them to break the law in order to prevent other young children from doing the same.

95. **Ms. Winter** said that the legal principle of guilt meant that it was necessary in most youth justice systems to know why a person had committed an offence.

96. **Sophia** said that, when interviewing a Geneva-based juvenile court judge for her documentary, she had asked what factors he took into consideration when ruling on a case involving a minor. The judge had explained that the court worked with a range of service providers, including teachers and parents, to produce a pretrial report that gave an overview of the child's situation.

97. **Mr. Van Keirsbilck** (Defence for Children International) said that, in addition to the need for the judicial system to understand the individual situation of a child who had broken the law, in order to ensure that he or she did not reoffend, there was also a collective need to understand why children committed offences, in order to improve efforts in the area of prevention. To achieve justice for children, cooperation between the judicial system and the social protection system was therefore vital.

Closing comments

98. **Ms. Aldoseri** said that the closing remarks would be given by Amy Spearman, a young student and social media influencer from Canada who used online platforms to make children aware of their rights. She was also the Canadian international youth correspondent for various organizations.

99. **Ms. Spearman** said that the various speakers had shown the magnitude of the positive change that could be achieved when the power of children's voices was combined with the power of adult allies. However, in order to realize a world in which all children reached their full potential, it was necessary to act on the obligation to ensure the

fundamental human rights of each and every child. While it was important to celebrate the progress that had been made since the launch of the Convention, there was always more work to be done. Some 30 countries had made over 100 pledges targeting many of the Convention's goals, such as making rights real, respecting children's views, and promoting education in children's rights. It was through acting on those pledges and continued persistence that a world would be created where all children's voices mattered and where all their rights were consistently upheld.

100. **Ms. Aldoseri** said that the Committee would continue to receive pledges from States parties wishing to recommit to the Convention until 20 November 2019, the date of the Convention's thirtieth anniversary. She was very grateful to all the children who had participated in the celebration, including those who had not come to Geneva but had made a vital contribution from their own countries, with the aim of making a difference. Their voices might be small, but they had made a huge impact.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.