Slide 2

* This is a quote from the President of Vanuatu, following Cyclone Pam in March 2015.
* This slide provides a snapshot of the multiple ways in which children’s rights are undermined by the impacts of climate change – from access to food and water, health and wellbeing, education, and even survival.
* Children, especially the most disadvantaged, are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change. Childhood represents a unique period of rapid physical and mental development, particularly between birth and the age of 5. This is when children’s bodies are most vulnerable to conditions that climate change and environmental risks exacerbate.
* For example, in terms of **malnutrition** arising from drought, this is responsible for over half of worldwide deaths of children under the age of five – children are particularly vulnerable as they need to consume more food and water per unit of bodyweight than adults.
* For those that survive, impacts can be lifelong; undernutrition in the first two years of life can lead to irreversible stunting (low height for age), affecting both physical and cognitive development.
* In terms of combatting **disease**, rising temperatures are lengthening the transmission season and expanding the geographic range of **vector-borne diseases** such as malaria and dengue. The global burden of these diseases is already concentrated on children – 78% of deaths from malaria in 2014 were among children under 5.
* Drought, flooding and more irregular rainfall patterns are increasing incidence of **diarrhoeal diseases**, another major cause of mortality for children – responsible for 530,000 deaths of children under 5 in 2015.
* Children are at risk of **physical and psychological trauma** during and after severe weather events, which are expected to increase in magnitude as global temperatures rise.
* Children are more likely than adults to die or suffer injuries, and in the aftermath, they are at heightened risk of **exploitation, violence and abuse** as a result of family separation, loss of family livelihoods, and migration as families seek to cope with the impacts.
* Linking **conflict** to climate change has been source of some debate, but there is a significant degree of consensus from experts that impacts of climate change (in terms of economic and social disruption) can act as a threat multiplier in fragile situations.
* In terms of **education**, schools may be destroyed and/or families displaced by extreme weather.
* Not all children are affected equally – climate change exacerbates inequality and affects the disadvantaged children most. **Girls** in particular are more likely to be taken out of school by families to help make up lost income when crops fail. As deforestation and desertification takes place, girls must walk further, spending more time to fetch water and fuel – allowing them less time to study and play, and placing them at risk in unsafe environments.
* **Poor families** live in more vulnerable areas and have fewer resources to cope with impacts. **Indigenous children’s** right to identity, including language and culture, may be affected by loss of traditional species and land, and induced migration.
* Important to remember two other ways in which children are disproportionately affected:
* The regions and countries most exposed to the impacts of climate change are among the poorest in our world, and characterised by a large **number of children as a share of overall population**. Shifts in demographics will accentuate this.
* Today’s children will **live longer** than most of the people in this room. Those with the highest exposure to climate risks will experience increasingly severe and recurrent crises during their lifetimes – this is an issue of intergenerational equity.

Slide 3

* Despite this situation, the relationship between climate change and children’s rights has not received the degree of examination and attention that it demands.
* Children’s rights have historically been overlooked in international negotiations on climate change under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the majority of national climate policies make little or no reference to children, meaning that:
* There is a lack of information and disaggregated data on children most at risk, and measures required to address their specific needs.
* Mechanisms to support children’s full and meaningful participation in climate-related policy discussions and initiatives are greatly needed.
* We are failing to benefit from children’s capacity to be powerful agents of change when empowered with appropriate knowledge and skills.

The most recent round of communications to the UNFCCC (intended Nationally Determined Contributions) illustrates this point – just 46/150 include the words ‘children’, ‘youth’ or ‘young people’ – less than one in three, and many of these are superficial references to vulnerable groups without further consideration. Only two mention intergenerational concerns.

On the flip side, policies and initiatives that address children’s rights, e.g. healthcare, tend to touch superficially at best on environmental issues such as climate change.

However, children and young people feel very strongly about climate change and how this will imping on their future. We polled over 5500 children in the UK and over 60 other countries using U-Report – a messaging service that allows young people to speak out on issues that matter to them,. Of those that responded, 77% think that climate change is one of the most pressing issues for young people today, and 98% think that Governments need to take urgent action against climate change.

Slide 4

* The Human Rights Council has recognised that States have obligations to protect human rights from environmental harm. These obligations encompass climate change.
* States have an obligation to adopt measures to protect children’s rights from the harmful effects of climate change – including both mitigation and adaptation measures.
* They must ensure that the measures they take in response to climate change themselves respect children’s rights – safeguarding against situations in which green projects are pushed through in a manner which undermines rights. An example is the construction of the Barro Blanco dam, a project in Panama under the UNFCCC’s Clean Development mechanism which is flooding townships and damaging livelihoods of the local indigenous population, depriving them of access to their land, water and food. In Guatemala, the Santa Rita dam has been associated with the murder of two indigenous children.
* In fulfilling these obligations, States have procedural duties including to:
* Assess climate-related impacts on children and to make climate-related information public and accessible through child-friendly and language-appropriate materials.
* Uphold children’s right to participate and be heard in climate policy dialogue and decision-making
* Provide access to effective and timely remedy for harm.
* States’ obligations apply in relation to harm caused by corporations and other private actors – in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
* Further progress is being made – in June 2016, the Human Rights Council’s resolution welcomed the adoption of the Paris Agreement, and decided to pursue a panel discussion and analytical study on climate change and children’s rights in its programme of work in 2017.

Slide 5

* The CRC has already provided further useful elucidation: *“[Climate change] is one of the biggest threats to children’s health and exacerbates health disparities...States should, therefore, put children’s health concerns at the center of their climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.”*

Slide 6

Since then, the Committee has issued a number of more detailed Concluding Observations – principally to developing countries. These emphasise measures to:

* Protect children’s rights in national climate and disaster risk management policies;
* Ensure their views are taken into account and to increase their awareness and preparedness through education.
* Seek international cooperation in implementing recommendations.
* And, in a new development, to address mitigation in more detail. In 2016, CRC made recommendation on climate change for the first time to a developed country – the UK, citing the impact of air pollution on children’s health in the UK, and its contribution to climate change affecting various rights in the UK and in other countries. Recommended placing children’s rights at the centre of both national and international climate strategies, including in the framework of international financial support.

Slide 7

In parallel, there have been significant developments in international climate change negotiations and other frameworks as well – the Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015, is the first ever international environmental agreement to explicitly recognise the importance of human rights obligations, including children’s rights, in the context of climate change.

[Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on **human rights**, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, **children**, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and **intergenerational equity**.“]

Slide 8

Other relevant national and international standards provide guidance for States:

* Sustainable Development Goals recognise climate change and development are intrinsically linked. Goal 13 on climate change sets out a target on promoting mechanisms that can raise capacity for effective climate change planning and management, including a focus on youth.
* The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030: emphasises that children and youth are agents of change and should be given the space and modalities to contribute to disaster risk reduction, in accordance with legislation and practice.

Slide 9

All of these developments offer important opportunities to improve coherence between States’ obligations under the CRC and their efforts to tackle climate change. The challenge and next step lies in bringing these strands together, and in translating words into the urgent action required.

Some Governments offer best practice examples – in Viet Nam, a new law on environmental protection incorporates children’s best interests in context of green growth and climate change.

In the Philippines, the 2016 Children’s Emergency Relief & Protection Act provides for specific care and protection of children affected by disasters.

I should also mention that the Committee on the Rights of the Child is assisting States to take a more joined up approach, having explicitly linked its most recent Concluding Observations, including on climate change, to relevant SDGs.