



**Child Rights Connect Submission to the UN Secretary-General's report in relation to the "Twentieth anniversary and promotion of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms"**

Child Rights Connect welcomes the OHCHR's call for inputs related to the resolution A/RES/72/247 entitled "Twentieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms". We believe that this resolution is a unique opportunity to strengthen the implementation of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (the Declaration). For this purpose, Child Rights Connect, as the largest global network working for the realization of children's rights worldwide, would like to highlight some gaps in the normative framework related to the protection and the empowerment of children as human rights defenders (CHRDs) and provide recommendations to enhance the mainstreaming of a child rights based approach to the situation of human rights defenders.

Based on the framework laid out by the Declaration and endorsed by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child<sup>1</sup> (CRC), all persons under 18 years old who act to promote their human rights, the rights of their peers or the rights of others (including adults) are human rights defenders, even if they do not consider themselves or are not considered and called as such by others. Just as adult human rights defenders, children are exposed to risk of threats, attacks and other negative consequences linked to their activities as human rights defenders. However, because of their specific rights, status and vulnerabilities, children human rights defenders are entitled to special protection and empowerment.

In its General Comment n° 20, the CRC Committee has explicitly called States to protect "adolescent human rights defenders, particularly girls who often face gender-specific threats and violence"<sup>2</sup>. However, the use of the terminology and definition of CHRDs as well as the reference to the Declaration cannot be found in any of the CRC Concluding Observations.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, children human rights defenders are invisible within the normative interpretation of the Declaration. In particular, the Commentary to the Declaration and the model law for the

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<sup>1</sup> See concept note of the 2018 Day of General Discussion of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on "[Protecting and empowering children as human rights defenders](#)"

<sup>2</sup> [General Comment 20 on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence](#)

<sup>3</sup> Keyword search "defenders" on the Human Rights Index

recognition and protection of human rights defenders<sup>4</sup> do not explicitly mention persons under 18 years old as a particular vulnerable group and as such tend to focus only on students' movements and a limited set of children's rights (civil rights and freedoms), rather than on the UNCRC as a whole. Moreover, children have not been considered in the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders. While the mandate holder integrates a gender perspective throughout his work, this does not extend to a child rights based approach.

The current disconnection between children's rights and the human rights defenders' framework is widespread within the broader UN human rights system and needs to be investigated and clarified, including its consequences on the ground, such as for example the lack of special protection measures for children in national and regional policies on the protection of human rights defenders<sup>5</sup>.

In light of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration, the CRC Committee has accepted Child Rights Connect's proposal for this year's Day of General Discussion (DGD) to be dedicated to the "Protection and empowerment of children as human rights defenders". In line with the goal of resolution A/RES/72/247 the objective of the DGD is, among others, to raise awareness about the situation of CHRDs, to let them share their experiences and views and to identify the gaps in international, regional and national human rights law regarding the protection and empowerment of CHRDs in order to find solutions.<sup>6</sup> It is also important to note that for the first time, the CRC Committee is designing its DGD with the direct inputs from CHRDs from all regions, including those in the DGD Children's Advisory Team.

The DGD will initiate a global movement for CHRDs including children themselves, States, National Human Rights Institutions, Children's Ombudspersons, the UN, civil society and the private sector to increase general awareness and understanding about the existence of CHRDs, their situation, actions and challenges. This movement will be connected to the Global coalition for the recognition and protection of human rights defenders launched by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, so that children's rights will become part of the human rights defenders' discourse.

In view of this, we recommend that member States and the relevant UN offices, departments and specialized agencies, including at the country level, follow closely the work around the DGD and engage with the CRC Committee, when relevant, in order to foster the recognition of children as human rights defenders and the realisation of their rights. We also strongly call member States and the relevant UN offices, departments and specialized agencies, including at the country level, to support the joint efforts by the CRC Committee and the Special

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<sup>4</sup> See the Declaration Commentary and the model law for the recognition and protection of human rights defenders

<sup>5</sup> See for example the Swiss Guidelines on the protection of children's rights defenders, the Law on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights Defenders of Cote D'Ivoire and the EU Guidelines on human rights defenders.

<sup>6</sup> All the information including the concept note are available at the CRC [website](#).

Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders to strengthen the existing normative frameworks in the follow-up to the DGD.