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* Thank you Mr. Chairman/Ambassador. Excellencies and distinguished participants, it’s a real pleasure to be here on behalf of UNICEF today and we **thank the Moroccan Presidency** for organising this important event on the relationship between climate change and the rights of the child. This discussion could not be more timely, given the urgency of the issue, and the recent discussions and emanating guidance regarding Governments’ obligations in this area from the Human Rights Council and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.
* Climate change undoubtedly represents one of the **most fundamental threats** facing the world’s children and future generations today. The adverse impacts of **climate change undermine multiple rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child** – the most widely-ratified international human rights treaty. From the right to access to food and water, to health and development, to education, and – far too often – a combination of those factors poses a threat to children’s survival, which directly endanger the rights set down by the **article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the basic rights to life, survival and development**.
* Indeed, children are affected by climate change more profoundly than adults due to their less developed physiology and immune systems. Childhood, especially **early childhood within the first 1000 days of life**, represents a unique period of rapid development, when children are most vulnerable to unhealthy conditions that climate change and environmental risks exacerbate.
* Currently 500 million children live in flood-prone areas, 160 million are exposed to severe drought, and 115 million are at high risk of tropical cyclones. **Drought and floods** destroy harvests, increase food insecurity and related malnutrition. Malnutrition makes children more vulnerable to severe diseases and is the underlying contributing factor of **45% of all child deaths**.The impacts of malnutrition can be lifelong – undernutrition in the first two years of life can lead to irreversible stunting, which is low height for age, which affects both physical and cognitive development, with long term economic and development implications for entire countries.
* Moreover, **climate change exacerbates the conditions for diseases that are currently the major causes of mortality for children under five years old:** diarrhoea, malaria and pneumonia. For example, children are so uniquely vulnerable to air pollution, which causes pneumonia and other respiratory diseases.
* As pointed out by the UNICEF Report “*Clear the Air for Children*” launched in October 2016, around **300 million children live in areas where the air is toxic** –six times below minimum quality standard limits– due, in part, to fossil fuel use. This is a major contributing factor in the **deaths of around 600,000 children under age 5 years old yearly.**
* Based on the above, UNICEF fully supports the Committee on the Rights of the Child’s recognition of climate change as **“one of the biggest threats to children’s health**” and calls on prioritizing children’s health in climate action strategies.
* **There is no time to waste** to protect the rights of hundreds of millions of children living in areas afflicted by the growing impacts of climate change – indeed, this is **not simply a moral call to action**, but **one that is demanded by the legal human rights obligations that States have undertaken**.
* In that light, we very much welcome the principles set down in the **Paris Agreement** that State Parties should “respect, promote and consider” human rights, including the rights of children and intergenerational equity, in their action to address climate change.
* This was reaffirmed by the recent Human Rights Council panel discussion on climate change and the Rights of the Child last march in Geneva, following the Council’s Resolution 32/33 which called for a deeper examination of this relationship. During the event there was a very rich discussion and an **evident momentum and support** voiced by Governments to take forward a child rights based approach to climate change action, notably through the implementation of the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework and the SDGs.
* Now we need to **put these commitments into action** – and fast. The Paris Agreement ‘rulebook’ that is being developed provides an important opportunity to reflect these principles in a holistic manner, **by embedding human and child rights as a cross-cutting priority** **which can inform Governments’ policies, programmes and investments**. Actions should be taken and uppholding children’s rights through climate change mitigation and adaptation will require:
  + Improving energy efficiency to limit global temperature rises to 1.5 degree or lower, urgently **phasing out fossil fuels** and transitioning to sustainable energy for communities – such as providing electricity for schools and health clinics with solar power panels and equipping households with fuel efficient cook stoves to reduce the need for firewood.
  + Investing in **community-resilient healthcare facilities, schools, and water and sanitation systems**, that are resistant when disasters strike.
  + **Building a climate-literate generation** through climate change education, with climate change integrated in formal school curricula and informal education; as well as empowering educators, parents, and children, as agents of change in their own communities.
* Prioritising children in National Plans will have **significant co-benefits**, from improving health as a result of lower air pollution, saving lives when extreme weather strikes or crops fail, and empowering children and youth to be agents of change in their homes and communities. All those aspects will contribute to achieving the SDGs and the agenda 2030.
* It is important to **ensure that children’s views and specific needs** **are sought, heard and acted upon**. Children’s views should be included in key processes notably in both the national and international climate talks, and in the national policies and actions.
* Finally, UNICEF is already working with many Governments around the world, in Africa, Asia, Europe and South America, to implement child-centred climate action in several areas and programmes, for example
* **Legislation** (the Philippines, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe), **Youth Engagement**, (Azerbaijan, Bolivia, India, Malaysia, Peru, Turkmenistan, Zambia and Natcoms J7 and G7 Summit), **Adaptation and Vulnerability** (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mali, PNG, Nepal, Uganda, and **Innovative sustainable energy solutions for children** (Angola, Bangladesh, Burundi, Somalia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and “schools-in-a-box” solutions).
* Finally, we continue to stand ready to advise and support governments and communities to implement the actions required.
* Thank you for your attention.

Follow up:

For additional and more specific recommendations, I would like also to refer to the UNICEF reports, and in particular to a very recent study, issued in March 2017, called “no place to call home: protecting children’s rights in the context of climate driven migration”. My colleague Joni Pegram, who will be attending the Conference on behalf of UNICEF, would be pleased to share this with those interested.

Finally, we look forward to engaging with the Government of Fiji, the upcoming President, on this crucial issue.