



Statement of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

General comment No. 26 on children's rights and environment, with a special focus on climate change, is ready!

Geneva, 29 August 2023

With general comment No. 26 (2023) adopted during its 93rd session, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child calls for urgent actions by States to tackle environmental degradation and climate change.

The general comment has three major pillars:

1. It sheds light on the harmful impacts of the triple planetary crisis, comprised of the climate emergency, the collapse of biodiversity and pervasive pollution on specific rights of current and constantly coming to the planet children.
2. It clarifies how the environmental protection is beneficial to children's rights and underscores that children have the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. This right is implicit in the Convention and directly linked to, in particular, the rights to life, survival and development, the highest attainable standard of health, an adequate living standard, and education. This right is also necessary for the full enjoyment of children's rights.
3. It specifies the legislative and administrative measures States should urgently implement to address the adverse effects of environmental degradation and climate change on the enjoyment of children's rights, and to ensure a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment now and to preserve it for future generations.

The Committee urges the States to take deliberate, concrete and targeted steps and to devote sufficient resources towards achieving the full and effective enjoyment of children's rights related to the environment, including their right to a healthy environment.

States should require businesses to undertake environmental impact assessments and child-rights due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for their actual and potential adverse impacts on the environment and children's rights, including those connected to their value chains and global operations.

With regard to climate change, the general comment underlines that States must take all necessary measures to protect against harms to children's rights related to climate change caused by business enterprises, such as by ensuring that businesses rapidly reduce their emissions.

The general comment can assist in interpreting States' commitment under the Paris Agreement to respect, promote and consider their child rights obligations when taking action to address climate change, and serve as an impetus for global-level change and as a powerful tool for children as well as their advocates to hold governments and other relevant actors accountable.

States should provide access to justice pathways for children affected by environmental harm, including complaints mechanisms that are child-friendly, gender-responsive and disability-inclusive. Mechanisms should be available for claims of imminent, foreseeable, past or current violations of children's rights, and should consider the specific, heightened and possibly lifelong nature of environmental harm for children. States should ensure that mechanisms are readily available to all children under their jurisdiction without discrimination, including for children outside their territory affected by transboundary harm emanating from their territories.

The general comment also emphasises the urgent and collective need for developed States to address the present climate finance gap, including through grants rather than loans to developing States to avoid negative impacts on children's rights. It also notes that climate finance is overly slanted toward mitigation at the cost of adaptation and loss and damage measures, which has discriminatory effects on children who live in areas where more adaptation measures are needed.

[General comment No. 26](#) was adopted after two rounds of consultation with States, national human rights institutions, international organizations, civil society, thematic experts and children. The Committee received 16,331 contributions from children in 121 countries; children shared and reported on the negative effects of environmental degradation and climate change on their lives and communities and asserted their right to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

“The General Comment will be used in so many ways – not just in court rooms,” said George, a 16-year-old children's rights activists from Zambia and one of the Committee's Child Advisors for the general comment. “It will be used to show how important the right to clean, health environment is. We mostly don't identify with how important this right is because we were not able

to link to other rights that we have. Rights are interdependent but sometimes we fail to show how they are linked. But the General Comment? It does this for us,” George added.

For 18-year-old Bach, the Committee’s Child Advisor and children’s rights advocate from Vietnam, “On the outcome of General Comment No. 26, I think that all of us children will only be truly satisfied when actions are actually being taken by government officials or powerful policy makers. Only when these individuals or these bodies and organisations make children’s rights a priority during decision making and actually uphold children’s rights do we actually feel like this process is actually being upheld,” Bach said.

According to Elisabeth, 17-year-old climate influencer, children’s rights activist and Child Advisor from Rwanda, “In all things that we do, it comes with hope. If there is no hope then there is nothing we can do. That is why we think that – as members of the General Comment Children’s Advisory Team and other children all over the world – as we have taken part in preparing the General Comment, preparing the document, collecting the ideas from all over the world, seeing the challenges and solutions for action, it gives us the hope that we are going to have a part in changing and giving the best reasons for how the environment is going to be protected in the present, and the future.”

“It is us children who are making advocacy, who are fighting for our futures,” Elisabeth added. “If you are here to help us, if you there are to support us, we have the hope for this General Comment.”

And for Tania, a 14-year-old climate activist and Child Advisor from Brazil, “I do have hope! GC26 has fuelled our activism and our hopes for a better world, just as it can fuel the hopes of people all over the world.”

The Committee will continue to highlight the impact of climate change and other environmental issues on children’s rights during its dialogues with States parties.