



The Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations

**Statement by
H.E. Ambassador Gunnar Pálsson
Permanent Representative**

Item 65 – Rights of the Child

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Mr. Chairman,

This year we celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the advances we have made since its conclusion. We sincerely hope that States Parties will seize this opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to implementing the provisions of the convention and urge Member States that have not done so to ratify the Convention and its two optional protocols.

Mr. Chairman,

The Convention has undoubtedly influenced the way we view children, who are now increasingly regarded as rights-holders. But as we review the achievements so far, the remaining challenges are apparent. The international community has set various benchmarks towards to the eventual realization of every child's rights, but our efforts must be strengthened if we are to succeed. The economic and financial crisis threatens to further slow or even reverse progress made towards the Millennium Development goals, all of which have direct impact on the well-being of children, and the goals for "a world fit for children", set out by the General Assembly's special session on children in 2002.

Efforts to fulfil the MDGs have brought some progress in areas such as poverty reduction and education. Iceland applauds progress made towards ensuring primary education for all children, girls and boys alike. At the same time, 75 million children are not enrolled in primary education, 55% of whom are girls, and access to secondary education is unsatisfactory. Realizing children's right to education is, of course, essential to both anti-poverty goals and health-related goals, as all the MDGs are interlinked.

Unfortunately, progress has not been comparable as regards other child-related MDGs. Despite considerable reduction in mortality rates among children under five years of age, more than six million children die every year of preventable diseases and insufficient neonatal care. As a result of the economic crisis and elevated food prices, malnutrition is reportedly on the rise.

Mr. Chairman,

Poverty reduction, education and improved access to food and water are substantial targets in their own right. They are also important elements of a comprehensive strategy to relieve conflict and support enduring peace. Deplorably, children continue to be recruited by armed groups as well as groups associated with terrorism and organized crime.

Some positive developments should nevertheless be noted. The work of the Special Representative on Children in armed conflict, in partnership with UNICEF and other UN agencies, has led to the release of numerous child soldiers and helped raise awareness about the dire situation confronting children in armed conflicts in different parts of the world. In line with the Special Representative's recommendation, the Security Council, following the adoption of resolution 1882, should now include on its agenda all conflicts where warring parties are found to be associated with the killing and maiming of children, as well as rape and sexual violence, in addition to recruitment. Further steps should be taken to ensure compliance and end impunity with regard to such crimes.

Mr. Chairman,

Remaining and emerging challenges require our continued vigilance. Fundamental barriers to the realization of children's rights remain in many countries. Early and forced marriage is one such barrier and every day 200 million children perform work that is damaging to their health and development. All over the world, children are victims of sexual abuse, exploitation, trafficking and corporal punishment. We urge Member States to end all forms of violence and discrimination against children and to take practical measures to realize children's rights. What better way, Mr. Chairman, to mark the anniversary of one of the most basic of our human rights conventions, the Convention on the Right of the Child?