*Press Statement: For Immediate Release*

**All Persons Below the Age of 18 Years are Children:**   
**Upholding All the Rights of All Children, Everywhere, at All Times**

**(New York/Geneva/Vienna, 6 October 2022)** The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child,  [the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict](https://www.un.org/sg/en/global-leadership/office-of-the-special-representative-of-the-secretary-general-for-children-and-armed-conflict/all), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, UNICEF, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, jointly call on Member States today to respect and ensure the rights of all children around the world and to recognize and protect all *persons under 18 years*.

Their joint statement is as follows:

“We are witnessing an increasing failure to uphold international humanitarian and human rights law obligations around the world, all against the backdrop of significant challenges posed by pandemics, complex humanitarian emergencies, and extreme weather events/climate-related crises. Children and families continue to be displaced, while conflicts as well as States’ efforts to counter armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, are further contributing to the erosion of international protection frameworks, often leading to the violation of children’s rights.”

“Today, we remind all States that children are full human rights holders, independently from parents or guardians, and are entitled to special protection under international human rights law, in particular under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history with 196 States parties. The Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out a wide range of human rights applicable to all children and underlines that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in all actions concerning them.We call on Member States to recognize all persons under 18 years as children and provide them with special protection.”

“We emphasize that Member States have the primary responsibility to protect, respect, and fulfill children’s rights, both in times of peace and in times of war. Whatever their age, gender, or status; whatever country they live in; or wherever they come from, all children are entitled to all their human rights, including the right to life, survival, and development; the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, including mental health; the right to education; the right to engage in play and recreational activities; the right to be protected from all forms of violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation; the right to access justice and humanitarian assistance; the right not to be deprived of liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily; and the right to express views freely in all matters affecting them, amongst others. However, the rights of children, including those living in conflict and post-conflict situations, are all too often violated.”

“We are particularly concerned about situations in which children above a certain age are treated as adults or as ‘young’ adults. In some instances, this is under the cover of traditional or cultural values or counterterrorism or national security responses, with dramatic implications for the full enjoyment of their rights and protections provided by the CRC.”

“We continue to call for the universal ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), on the Sale of Children Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (OPSC), on a Communications Procedure (OPIC) to ensure children are treated as children, and to end once and for all the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18 years by armed forces and groups. We further call for the endorsement of other international instruments such as the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Safe Schools Declaration, and the Vancouver Principles, which support the protection of children from armed conflict. In addition, children who have been recruited or used and who have been released or have escaped must receive long-term, sustainable, gender and age-sensitive, and disability-inclusive reintegration programmes, with access to health care, mental health and psycho-social support, education, and protection, among other support.”

“Childhood is a special, protected phase of life during which children have specific rights as recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It must, therefore, remain recognized and treated as separate from adulthood. Today, we call on all States to uphold their international legal obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ensure that all children, without discrimination, are allowed to be children, to grow, learn, and play in a safe, inclusive, and caring environment, and to thrive with dignity. Everywhere. And at all times.”