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ConclusionsoftheGeneralRapporteurfortheConference

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Ladies and gentlemen, I am honoured to be the general rapporteur for this conference and to summarise and wrap up the important discussions and exchanges which have taken place over the past two days.

First of all, please allow me to thank all of you, as participants, for your lively participation throughout this conference. Thank you for bringing your powerful ideas and your enthusiasm to this conference.

Thank you to our speakers and moderators during the plenary sessions and power talks. Your expertise and guidance through these challenging issues have shown vision and will be invaluable to the Council of Europe and other actors as we build and pursue the agenda in the context of the last two years of the current Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child.

Thank you, in particular, to our young delegates, who have participated throughout this conference in numerous and active ways. Their eloquent and thought-provoking interventions have shown precisely why it is vital that children are seen *and heard* whenever we talk about child human rights issues.

A big thank you to the Secretariat: the Children's Rights Division team and other Council of Europe supporting staff, who have all been involved in organising the conference, ensuring such an exciting and successful agenda, and making things run so smoothly.

And finally, sincere thanks to the French Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, who placed children's rights high on their agenda, under the leadership of their dynamic Secretary of State for Child Protection, Mr. Adrien Taquet, and who have supported the organisation of this conference.

As the Chair of the intergovernmental committee for the rights of the child, I want to reflect on the main take-aways of the conference and to link them to the current and future work of the Committee in the remaining years of the Strategy implementation and beyond.

Priority area 1 - Equal opportunities

For the first priority area of the strategy - equal opportunities for children, we heard many existing obstacles in the **power talk on inclusion**.

Among others, we heard about the disturbing persistence of child poverty which destroys dreams and aspirations and divides our societies between the haves and the have-nots.

As far as the child rights intergovernmental committee is concerned, we will continue to support states in introducing and enhancing the quality and effects of child impact assessments and we count on the European Committee on Social Rights to keep the focus of States on finding the right gateway to address child poverty in a comprehensive manner.

In **the high-level plenary sessions**, we heard of the action that the Council of Europe, member states and other stakeholders were taking to promote the equal opportunities of children and to tackle discrimination faced by particular groups, including refugee and migrant children.

Priority area 2 - Child participation

The second priority area of the Strategy is participation for all children. First and foremost, it is important that the Council of Europe has put theory into practice by giving children a platform to have their views and experiences heard throughout this conference. This serves as a model for engaging children in meaningful participation. Their valuable contributions also demonstrate the benefit of child participation and the diversity and richness that this adds to the conversation.

In the power talk on children and participation, we heard of the barriers in the way to achieving full participation of children. We are listening to children... but are we really hearing to what they have to say?

Various power talks provided further context and illustrated the scale of children's exclusion from participation in society.

In **the power talk on media**, for example, we heard about children being excluded and marginalised: both in media coverage and in its creation. We have also witnessed powerful media initiatives by children themselves to speak up on society issues. In the **power talk on technology**, we heard from a young delegate on the difference that technology can make in improving inclusion and access of children with disabilities.

Priority area 3 - Violence against children

The third priority area of the Strategy is a life free from violence for all children: an aim which is shared by Target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Agenda. In **the second high-level plenary session, the interventions from the UN Special Representative of the Secretary- General on Violence against Children of the**, as well as the findings of the mid-term evaluation process, made it clear that we are still far from achieving this aim.

In **the power talk on support**, we heard of the difficult and often ignored topic of sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviours displayed by children, including the phenomenon of so-called “sexting”. We also heard of some excellent models for tackling these behaviours, through education, including sexuality education, and through the provision of support by schools and families.

In **the power talk on speaking up against violence**, we were provided with a much-needed insight into the methods of creating safe environments for children, and mechanisms which can enhance their protection. Both in this session, and in the powerful performance of “**Take it like a man**”, we heard of the long-lasting and profoundly negative effects which violence can have upon children, making the impetus to step up action even more urgent.

Priority area 4 - Child-friendly justice

Child-friendly justice is the fourth Strategy priority area.

In **the power talk on family relations**, we heard of some of the difficult situations that may arise when familial relationships break down or are put under strain. Often, these turn into legal disputes, where solutions must be found to ensure that children’s best interests and right to be heard are respected.

Children’s rights in the family context has not been an area of focus in the first three years of the **CAHENF**. But it is clear that this must change. Based on the insights provided by this power talk, we will seek - jointly with the European Committee for legal cooperation - to develop tools and standards in upholding the best interest determination of the child in parental separation and child-care proceedings,

In **the power talk on support**, it was made clear that criminal justice responses are not always the most appropriate method of tackling problems lying at the root of children who display harmful behaviours. Instead, our experts demonstrated frameworks for diversionary, educational and supportive methods which should be used as a first port of call. This dimension must also be fed into the **CAHENF**’s future work on peer violence and harmful sexual behaviours.

Even when criminal justice responses are required, children’s rights and best interests must be placed at the centre of considerations. As the **Human Rights Commissioner** observed, there is too often the attitude that children must “deserve”, or “earn”, their rights. These attitudes must be resisted at all costs, and in whatever forms it takes.

Priority area 5 - Digital environment

The fifth and final priority area is the rights of the child in the digital environment. **Across the power talks**, we have heard of the rising influence of information and communication technologies which permit unprecedented access to information, as well as children's access and exposure to age-inappropriate and harmful content, such as pornography.

In **the power talk on technology**, we heard of the innumerable opportunities – and risks – of advancements in new technologies, such as artificial intelligence. It is clear that the dominance of industry in this area means that they will be key stakeholders in upholding and respecting children's rights in the future and that tensions will continue as innovators expect children to sacrifice their privacy to various compelling applications.

The **power talk on data** provided a specific insight into the rights-balancing exercise which the digital environment requires decision-makers to take. Yet solutions must tread the line of respecting children's freedom of expression, while balancing the benefits of big-data analysis in finding solutions and tailoring services.

Delivering the strategy: stakeholders

Finally, we turn to the question of how best to overcome these challenges, and ensure, as the last panel has discussed, that Europe is "future-proof" for children and their rights. It is clear to me that, with the complexity and global nature of the challenges faced by children today, it is vital that all stakeholders, at all levels, take up their roles and work together.

As the **Secretary General of the Council of Europe** noted in her opening speech, the mid-term evaluation shows that member states are committed to maintaining the human rights of children as a priority at national and European levels. I am grateful for her engagement, enthusiasm and leadership in taking the rights of the child further.

The commitment to protect children's rights was echoed during the **second high-level plenary session**, in which we heard of the dedication of member state governments and other stakeholders in tackling the challenges across all five Strategy priority areas. This will provide the fuel which is necessary to drive change forward.

In the **power talk on collaboration**, we heard of the appetite for collaboration and coordination from representatives of numerous stakeholders, and who provided food for thought in areas in which this can most promisingly be achieved.

Finally, the **first high-level plenary session** showcased some of the successes of mainstreaming children's rights across the Council of Europe. Mainstreaming is vital in embedding children's rights and ensuring that they are placed high on national and European agendas.

We must redouble our efforts to engage in and foster these collaborative actions, including through consciously working to support member states in the achievement of the UN SDGs. Over the course of the past few days, we have strengthened and widened our networks. My mission will be to ensure that this is taken forward by the work of the **CAHENF**.

Conclusions

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that we are at a turning point for children's human rights. Child rights issues are no longer seen as niche, or secondary, but as a central part of upholding democratic principles and the human rights of 150 million European citizens who are under the age of 18. The representation of so many stakeholders, from international to local levels, and from the high-level to children and those working on the ground, is testament to that.

It is true that many challenges remain in our paths. There are still those who must be convinced that children's rights are human rights. And there are many new challenges on the horizon, in these times of rapid change and movement. In short, we all have our work cut out for us.

But I have seen the unity and the passion of the people in this room. I have heard from those who have dedicated their careers and time to defending and furthering children's rights. I have heard the young delegates' hope for the future of children's rights, and their pleas for adults to stand with them, and to stand up for their rights. Having seen and heard all of this, I am more confident than ever in our ability to build a Europe with and for children, based on democratic citizenship, human rights and the rule of law for all.

So, let's harness that passion and power to fight for children's rights, and let's empower children to do the same: ladies and gentlemen, let's redefine and redistribute power in Europe.

Thank you.