



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON  
**VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN**

**Beyond the Horizon: a New Era for the Rights of the Child**

**High-level Launching Conference for the new Strategy  
for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)**

**7-8 April 2022**

**Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on  
Violence against Children**

**Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Young Delegates,

It is a pleasure to be with you all today, and I would like to thank the Council of Europe and the Government of Italy for the invitation to participate in this event.

**The launch of the New Strategy on the Rights of the Child comes at a crossroad and critical moment.**

**The urgency for investing in the effective protection of children's rights is more relevant than ever within this region and worldwide.**

I would like to highlight 4 key messages today:

**First, too many children worldwide are still left behind**

Across the world, **progress in the protection of children's rights has been slowed or even reversed by the pandemic and ongoing humanitarian crisis**

**The pandemic has increased violence against children both offline and online**, including domestic violence, sexual exploitation, child labor, child marriage.

**Social inequalities, discrimination and digital divide have been exacerbated** affecting mainly the poor and most vulnerable children.

**Armed conflicts, food insecurity and environmental degradation** have reached such levels that **we are witnessing an unprecedented level of forced displacement of children.**

Worldwide, millions of children have been affected by long-term conflicts in countries such as Syria, Myanmar, Yemen, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and the Sahel region, among others.

In Europe in just a few weeks 2 million children have been forced to flee life-threatening attacks on their homes, schools and communities in Ukraine, with an additional 2.5 million children displaced within country.<sup>1</sup>

Many of them, especially unaccompanied and separated from their families, children in institutions are most likely to be victims of child trafficking, sexual exploitation, child labor, enrolment of children in armed, criminal and violent extremist groups or go missing along these dangerous journeys

**Second, huge toll is paid by children and societies within this region and worldwide.**

Children are experiencing severe and long-lasting mental health problems such as anxiety, behavioral disorders, depression and suicide.

**Children denied of their rights may not reach their full education and health potential,** which will limit their future income and productivity and impact human capital development.

**These multidimensional crises have severely tested the capacity of States, communities and families** to ensure children's education, protection and wellbeing

**Third, It is a global scourge that we need to do all in our power to stop, before it risks evolving in a global child rights' crisis.**

We must learn the lessons of the pandemic as well as past and ongoing humanitarian crises.

**We must shift the paradigm and look beyond the horizon.**

---

<sup>1</sup> [Two million refugee children flee war in Ukraine in search of safety across borders \[EN/UK\] - Poland | ReliefWeb](#)

We must **move away from siloed and unsustainable actions to a child, gender sensitive and integrated approach and invest in cross sectoral systems and services** that are accessible to all children without discrimination.

This integrated approach echoes **the interdependence of children's rights and of the Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring complementarity between humanitarian, security, peace and people-centred development.**

We must see **spending on the integrated across sectoral systems as a key investment with a high return** for children, families and entire societies.

The Strategy launched today provides a useful roadmap and clear guidance what to do and how to build a new Era for the rights of the child.

Its effective implementation cannot wait and calls for a wide **mobilization** and strong multi-stakeholder **partnerships, to build just, inclusive, peaceful, safe and empowering environments for all children, leaving no one behind.**

**Fourth, children are key partners and must be seen as part of solution.**

Children worldwide including the most vulnerable are taking action, defending their rights, bringing positive changes in their communities, despite various challenges they face.

Children were involved in the design of this Strategy and must be involved in the monitoring of its implementation.

We need to involve and empower them more and more. This means providing child-friendly ways for children to receive information, to express themselves freely, to participate to decision making processes.

This means also protecting children who are actively involved in civic engagement and in defending human rights.

**Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear young delegates**

Protecting all children and their rights CANNOT WAIT.

We must act better and faster to translate this well-designed strategy document into concrete actions that will reach all children, without discrimination.

So, let's do it for and with children, today and not tomorrow.

Thank you!