



NGOs call on States to ratify the UN complaints procedure on children's rights

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

Geneva, 28 February 2012 – For the first time and more than twenty years after the official recognition of their rights, children are provided with the possibility to access justice at the international level through a newly adopted complaints procedure.

For this procedure to become a tangible reality for child victims, States need to sign and ratify the new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child before it can enter into force and display its effects. The official UN signing ceremony opening the Protocol for signature and ratification took place today, **28 February 2012**, during the UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva.

Twenty States from across the world, namely Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Finland, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Maldives, Mali, Montenegro, Morocco, Peru, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Uruguay, demonstrated strong leadership and political commitment to protecting children's rights by signing the Protocol today.

This is an important first step, but those States will still need to ratify the Protocol in order to be bound by its provisions and at least ten countries must ratify the Protocol before it can be used.

"It is our hope that every country lives up to their responsibilities towards children by signing and ratifying this instrument without delay" said Lisa Myers, Director of the NGO Group for the CRC, on behalf of its members and partners, *"We have to make sure that this new instrument enters into force quickly so that it can be used by children who need it."*

The Optional Protocol will invigorate the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its existing Protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It will give children, and their representatives, the ability, if they cannot secure justice in their country, to appeal to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child - the international independent body in charge of monitoring the implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocols.

The signing ceremony at the United Nations is the result of active campaigning by an NGO coalition representing child rights and human rights NGOs across the world since 2006. The NGO coalition campaigned for this new instrument to offer children a level of protection equivalent to that provided to adults at the UN level.

The NGO coalition will continue its work to ensure that this third Protocol enters into force as soon as possible, as experience working on previous Protocols has shown this to be fundamental. It will also work to raise awareness and understanding about this instrument among adults and children alike, and galvanising public support to make sure this Protocol is used to make a real difference for the protection of children's rights around the world.

Notes to editors:

The UN official signing ceremony follows the adoption of the third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the UN General Assembly on 19 December 2011 which created this new international treaty.

A complaints or “communications” procedure allows individuals, groups or their representatives, claiming that their rights have been violated by a State that is a party to a Convention, to bring a communication before the relevant UN treaty body; provided that the State has accepted the procedure and that the complainants have exhausted domestic remedies.

How the CRC complaints procedure is unique:

- In reviewing communications, the Committee on the Rights of the Child must follow the principle of the best interests of the child and have regard to the rights and views of the child;
- The Rules of Procedure for using the complaints mechanism are to be child-sensitive;
- Safeguards must be introduced to prevent potential manipulation of children, and the Committee can decline to consider communications that are not in the child's best interests;
- The identity of any individuals involved in submitting a complaint, including child victims, cannot be revealed publicly without their express consent; and
- Communications must be submitted with the child victim's consent, unless the person submitting a complaint can justify acting on the child's behalf without that consent.

The NGO Group for the CRC is a network of 80 international and national non-governmental organisations, which work together to facilitate the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

For UN accredited and Geneva based media, please contact Anita Goh, NGO Group for the CRC (in English, French or Spanish) on +41 76 358 1222 or goh@childrightsnet.org for more information and interviews.

For background information on the NGO coalition and the international campaign, see: <http://www.childrightsnet.org/NGOGroup/childrightsissues/ComplaintsMechanism/>