

Statement by

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at the

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Panel Discussion: Bringing standards closer to children: co-operation and partnerships for sustainable action

Question 1: What are UNICEF's expectations from such a platform?

Answer: In responding to this question, let me address three basic questions regarding a Children's Rights Platform - Why a platform, Who should be involved, and How should it be set-up?

- **UNICEF fully welcomes the idea of a Children's Rights Platform which will serve to support the planning, implementation and evaluation of the Council of Europe Strategy on Children's Rights.** The platform will bring together key stakeholders on children's rights in Europe, most are here with us today, which will be able to jointly assess progress and provide collective leadership and guidance as well as inspiration. Building on our on-going collaboration, UNICEF will very much welcome the opportunity to actively engage in such a platform and contribute to ensure its success.

- **A Children’s Rights Platform will provide a key opportunity for knowledge sharing, exchange of experiences and dialogue on lessons learned amongst COE member states as well as between Governments and key partners such as the EU, ENOC, civil society and relevant UN agencies, UNICEF in particular.** Such a facilitated dialogue and systematic interaction will help better define effective strategies, identify gaps in standards on relevant issues, and importantly, guarantee a higher implementation level of the COE Strategy. The platform will also create internal synergies across the different initiatives of the Council of Europe that pertain to children. **Knowledge sharing, mobilizing communities of stakeholders and inspiring collective action can all be in the remit of the platform.**

- **On the question of ‘How’, exploring a combination of both formal and informal mechanisms should be useful.**
 - On one hand, a formal mechanism, with more defined membership and mandate over the duration of the Strategy, can facilitate and help ensure a more in-depth discussion on planning, review of progress and achievement of results. Following on what COE envisaged in the previous cycle of the programme, the platform should be led by COE member states and state institutions, whose roles could be further strengthened and made more visible. In addition to COE monitoring bodies, relevant state institution(s) could assume greater accountability and reporting and coordinating responsibilities at country level.

 - On the other hand, there should be adequate opportunities to set up ‘issues-based’ informal networks, Ad Hoc Advisory and Expert Groups around specific issues of concern, including stumbling block or bottlenecks in change processes that countries may be going through to implement COE standards. This will allow the mobilization of relevant knowledge and resources and, when necessary, a wider network of stakeholders and partners to facilitate countries’ efforts towards implementing COE standards. **Flexibility of the platform’s mechanisms** will be

helpful in order to bring as many players as needed, and when appropriate, on an Ad Hoc basis, around specific issues.

- **Clearer roles and commitment.** Within the mandate of each participating partner, the platform will also provide additional opportunities to better understand each organization's comparative institutional capacities and added-value and will strengthen potential for success through ensuring complementary and synergies of interventions.

Overall, an opportunity for different stakeholders to come together through a Children's Rights Platform, with Governments at the helm, and encompassing external COE partners such as civil society, the EU, COE and international agencies including UNICEF and the wider UN family, as well as key personalities, is valuable in promoting complementarity and synergy of our individual initiatives as well as collective efforts. I believe this is among the key ways to ensure the implementation of the COE Strategy, and thereby the full realization of the rights of all children.

Question 2: Which potential contributions could UNICEF make to the platform?

- UNICEF has been a key partner of the Council of Europe, in particular, with regards to its work on children and children's rights. We will continue to bring this spirit to a Children's Rights Platform and be an active member, and if necessary, among its core members.
- Based on a productive collaboration between COE and UNICEF over the course of the first two programmes, there are clearly a number of specific areas where UNICEF is in a good position to contribute to the success of the platform. These include:

Actively engaging in the platform to bring documented lessons learned from the field and technical knowledge on Child Rights programming and policy development. UNICEF has accompanied child protection reforms in many of the COE member states over a number of years and we would continue to share this experience.

As the Deputy Secretary-General explained to our Executive Board when she addressed it in September 2011, “UNICEF could be at the heart of the COE processor, in the microchips, in the wires, in the connections.” In this regard, we will continue to work with COE and with the platform to help ensure that COE guidelines, policies and recommendations take fully into account international standards and are sensitive to lessons learned from the field. UNICEF, through our work in other regions, is well placed to bring international best practices to the platform.

- **UNICEF, with its presence at country level, both through our country programmes and UNICEF National Committees, will be able to contribute to the implementation of the platform’s agenda, in particular, the Children’s Rights Strategy 2012-2015.** In addition, we also collaborate with Council of Europe in the area of research, through UNICEF’s Innocenti Resource Center (IRC) in Florence.

- The Council of Europe and UNICEF have a **natural partnership based on strongly shared values**. It was not only a common vision which we shared, but a common determination to achieve results for children, especially for those most vulnerable and whose rights remain unrealized and in too many cases, unacceptably violated, despite our best efforts.

- **All four strategic objectives of the COE draft strategy are key areas of UNICEF work, and through our programmes, UNICEF will be able to contribute to the achievement of these objectives.** We also believe, that in the same spirit, the work of the Council of Europe on children’s rights significantly support what UNICEF has been trying to do in the region.

- Child participation as appropriately highlighted in the COE draft strategy, promoting child participation, in different ways and opportunities, are critical, (1) to realize their right to participate, but also, (2) for us policy makers and decision-makers to better understand the needs and aspirations of children and young people, and thereby make standards and tools promoting children’s rights more responsive. Crucial, in all these efforts, is the

importance of making sure that the genuine voices of children, including those with less voice, come through.

- On Child-friendly services, COE has thoughtfully involved UNICEF in the development of all its work on child-friendly services and we had provided, not only technical expertise available in UNICEF, but most critically, important lessons from the field. We will continue to do so in the future.

- And finally, as underlined in the draft Strategy, implementation is crucial. As I had mentioned, UNICEF is active in all but five COE member states, and through our country programmes and National Committees, we stand side-by-side with COE in support of your objective to increase implementation of the COE standards and tools, and more prominently, the strategy for 2012-2015 and indeed, build a child-friendly Europe.
