

# STEP UP!

**A joint commitment by  
Heads of United Nations Entities**

*to promote the right of children, youth and future generations to a healthy environment and their meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels, in relation to climate action and climate justice.*

June 2021

## Step up!

### *A joint commitment by Heads of United Nations Entities*

*Recalling* the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and all human rights instruments relevant to the protection, promotion, respect and fulfilment of the human rights of all children and young people, as well as Human Rights Council Resolutions 37/8, 35/20, 40/11 and 45/30 which address the rights of children and young people with respect to environmental harm and climate change, and that a safe climate is a vital element of the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment and is essential to human life and well-being,

*Recalling* the Paris Agreement commitment by States to respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, including the rights of children, and intergenerational equity, when taking action to address climate change,

*Recalling also* the 2030 Agenda which recognizes young people as critical agents of change,

*Recalling also* the Joint Appeal from the United Nations System to the Secretary-General's 2019 Climate Action Summit for Member States to increase ambition and take concrete action to limit global temperature increases to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and adapt to the effects of climate change, and the Earth Charter, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Global Youth Climate Action Declaration, the Kwon Gesh Pledge, the COP25 Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action, the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and

Development of Children, the Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations towards Future Generations, the Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change, the Declaration of the People's Summit on Climate, Rights and Human Survival, the Children's Environmental Rights Initiative, the UNDP Climate Promise, and all other relevant frameworks and initiatives,

*Reaffirming* the full commitment by United Nations entities to 'Youth2030', the first United Nations Youth Strategy, aligned with the 2030 Agenda and which aims at ensuring that the human rights of every young person are realized; enabling every young person to be empowered to achieve their full potential; and recognizing young people's agency, resilience and positive contributions,

*Deeply conscious of* the unprecedented urgency to step up efforts at all levels, in order to address the dangerous effects of climate change and other environmental crises, including biodiversity loss and pollution, responding to the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights, emphasizing climate justice and the rights of future generations,

*Recalling* that children and youth have the right to freedom of expression, access to information, education, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, to be heard, to be consulted on issues affecting them, to have their views given due weight, and to have access to an effective remedy, including through child- and youth-friendly and sensitive mechanisms; and *concerned also* that, despite progress made towards the full implementation of the right to participate in public affairs worldwide, many

people, particularly children and young people, continue to face abuses and barriers, such as risk of violence, arrest, discrimination, including multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, in the enjoyment of their right to participate in public affairs as well as in the enjoyment of other human rights that enable it,

*Recognizing* the positive, important and legitimate role played by children and youth, and by child- and youth-led movements that defend human rights relating to a healthy environment, and deeply concerned that they may be among those most exposed and at risk, and recognizing the need to empower and protect them,

*Recognizing also* that both the Paris Agreement and the COVID-19 recovery process present an unprecedented opportunity to set our economies and societies on a green path and to promote a just transition, and acknowledging that this moment of hope in which we need to better listen to and partner with children and youth and in which young people and children have demonstrated that they are taking on responsibility – and demanding it of others,

**We, Heads of United Nations entities,** strongly commit to the promotion of the rights of children, youth and future generations to climate justice and a healthy environment, and agree on the need to **step up our action in this area.**

## **We commit to:**

- > **Support and carry out effective advocacy for global recognition and realization of young people's and children's inalienable right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment,**

recognizing the disproportionate impacts that the climate crisis and environmental harm have on them and future generations, as well as acknowledging their role as key stakeholders and critical agents of change; and, increasing United Nations' support to Member States, at all levels, for legislative and policy frameworks that promote and implement the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and for effective access to justice and remedies for environment-related matters.

- > **Take necessary steps to support the scaling up of the meaningful participation of children and young people in all stages of the definition, implementation and review of UN policies, and inform and encourage a cross-cutting focus on children and youth in climate action,** inter alia, when and where applicable, in the implementation of the Paris Agreement and relevant environmental agreements, human rights laws and standards at all levels, the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, in countries' national climate adaptation and mitigation measures, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Universal Periodic Reviews (UPRs), in support to the work of United Nations human rights mechanisms including the UN Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures, and in long-term greenhouse gas emissions development strategies, including by considering the particular role and responsibilities of the private sector; and, in this spirit, we commit to systematically consider and support the inclusion of the rights and needs of children, youth and future generations in decision-making processes, through inter-generational

dialogues and relevant mechanisms at all levels, also recognizing the need for these to be co-designed with the participation of children and youth;

- > **Enable and support the leadership and empowerment of children and young people in environmental action, with a particular emphasis on the most marginalized in an effort to leave no one behind**, taking into consideration the unique and intersecting forms of discrimination that many children and youth face, by supporting human rights-based and child-,youth-and gender-inclusive needs analyses and assessments as well as project design, implementation and monitoring, by enhancing opportunities for civic engagement, political participation, learning, access to digital skills and decent jobs for youth - including within the United Nations through relevant opportunities - and by offering access to targeted, flexible and agile funding for children and youth capacity development and youth leadership;
- > **Partner systematically, genuinely and meaningfully with diverse groups of children and youth at local, national, regional and global levels**, by supporting the meaningful participation of children and youth in decision-making spaces, protecting and promoting their civic space, including by enhancing support for the protection against retaliation, reprisals and intimidation, convening inter-generational dialogues and promoting inter-generational partnerships, amplifying their voices, expanding avenues for their meaningful participation in decision-making on climate change, enabling and fostering consistency and longevity for youth-led efforts in

environment and human rights processes, and promoting transformative education with respect to nature, capacity-development, networking, and financing;

- > **Uphold, respect, protect and fulfill all human rights, including the rights of children and youth with respect to the environment and climate justice**, including the right to life, the right to play, the right to culture, the right to meaningful and informed participation, indigenous peoples' rights and the right to development; and promote core principles related to the rights of children and youth, including non-discrimination, gender equality, inclusivity, intersectionality, as well as key commitments including "do no harm", leaving no-one behind, a precautionary and preventive approach, intergenerational equity and social cohesion, and indigenous people's rights, all of which are fundamental to the effective enjoyment of the right of children, youth and future generations to a healthy environment;
- > **Promote relevant child- and youth-inclusive and child- and youth-led research, data collection, analysis and accountability, to nurture decisions that truly respond to addressing** the impacts of the environmental crisis on children, youth and future generations, and that explore frontier issues related to human rights, climate and environmental justice and child and youth empowerment, more broadly.