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The Netherlands

***10th anniversary of OPIC-CRC: 10 years delivering justice to children.***

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Madam Chair, Madam Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights, esteemed members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Excellencies, distinguished participants, valued civil society actors, and, most importantly, children and young people.

It is a great honor to speak to you today as Professor of Children's Rights at Leiden University in the Netherlands and as the initiator of the Leiden Children's Rights Observatory.

The [Leiden Children's Rights Observatory](#) serves as a dedicated academic platform that provides scientific and analytical insights into access to justice for children, with a particular focus on the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child under the 3rd Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure – OPIC. Over the years, we have published numerous commentaries that critically assess and provide a deeper understanding of the Committee's decisions, views and reports, with the aim to foster an informed dialogue around children's rights and children's access to justice.

Earlier this year, in April, we had the privilege of organizing a two-day international conference commemorating the 10th anniversary of OPIC, in collaboration with the Petitions Section of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UNICEF. This gathering provided an opportunity to reflect on the progress made under OPIC and to explore ways to further strengthen the procedure. We were particularly grateful for the presence of representatives of the governments of countries which consider ratifying OPIC or are in process of doing so.

From our observations and research over the past decade, we conclude that OPIC has already made its mark and that its entry into force confirms that children, like

all other human beings, have the right to access justice and to seek just and timely remedies for rights violations.

However, we can also identify four crucial areas that require focused attention to increase the success and meaning of OPIC.

**First**, we need more State ratifications of OPIC, as also acknowledged by previous speakers. Currently, too few countries have ratified the protocol, limiting its reach and impact. It is essential that more States commit to this important mechanism so that children everywhere can have access to this critical avenue of justice.

**Second**, we must continue to support the Committee in performing its responsibilities under OPIC and in delivering *timely, high quality and impactful* decisions. The OPIC mandate, which goes beyond communications and includes inquiry reports, among others, has come on top of the Committee's other responsibilities as a UN treaty body. And more ratifications will mean more cases and more work. As a collective effort, we need to make sure that the Committee will be able to take decisions that offer consistent interpretations of State obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, provide clear and actionable guidance for States and offer meaningful remedies. By addressing difficult and complex issues in a well-reasoned and authoritative manner, the Committee can further strengthen the credibility and influence of its decisions, encouraging States to uphold their commitments under the Convention and its Optional Protocols, and improve the protection of children against rights violations.

Connectedly, the role of third-party interventions, such as amicus curiae submissions, is the **third crucial area** that deserves our attention to enhance OPIC's impact. These interventions – and the Committee has developed specific guidelines on this – allow external actors, including Independent Children's Rights Institutions and academics/academic centers, like the Leiden Children's Rights Observatory, to provide specific expertise, academic and otherwise, on complex issues in communications. For instance, such contributions were vital in addressing the extraterritorial jurisdiction of States regarding children in camps in northern Syria, helping the Committee navigate complex legal questions and clarify State obligations. By offering specialized expertise, third-party interventions are needed to ensure that the Committee's decisions are well-informed and effectively tackle challenging legal issues affecting children's rights.

The accessibility of OPIC, more specifically its accessibility for children, is another critical area where further progress remains needed. **This is my fourth point.** The Committee and the Petitions Section have made commendable efforts

in recent years to make the OPIC process more child-friendly and child-centered. A particularly inspiring example was the Committee's open letter to the children involved in the climate case, which served as a direct and meaningful way to communicate the outcome and its significance to the young complainants.

In addition, the Committee has worked with Child Rights Connect and students from our [Advanced Master of International Children's Rights program](#) at Leiden University to develop *child-friendly summaries* of OPIC views and decisions. These will soon become available through a dedicated section of our Observatory. Such initiatives help to make the outcomes of the communications more understandable and accessible to the children who are at the heart of this procedure.

As we commemorate ten years of OPIC, we must recognize the significant achievements that have been made. The foundation laid by the Committee, with the support of the Petitions Section and many dedicated partners, has been instrumental in advancing children's rights on the global stage.

Yet, much more work remains to be done to make OPIC *accessible, credible and impactful*.

While OPIC is vital as an international avenue for justice, its greatest impact lies in strengthening domestic systems. We must prioritize national solutions so that children can seek redress within their own countries before resorting to international mechanisms. Ratifying OPIC can drive States to enhance access to justice for children locally, reducing the need for international complaints and fostering environments where children's rights are consistently upheld. Ultimately, OPIC supports both individual redress and the development of robust, child-centered legal systems that ensure equitable access to justice for all children.

In closing, I would like to congratulate everyone involved in this journey. Your commitment, dedication, and hard work have brought us to this point, establishing a strong platform for the future. As we look ahead, the Leiden Children's Rights Observatory stands ready to support all future endeavors to make OPIC a success. Together, we can ensure that the right to access justice becomes a reality for children everywhere.

Thank you.