

Human Rights Council 16th Session

Annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child (res. 13/20)

Statement delivered by World Vision International and [other INGOs including Defence for Children International-DCI]

Thank you, Mr. President.

This Statement is delivered on behalf of a number of listed NGOs.

Street children are vulnerable to inadequate nutrition, physical injuries, harmful use of alcohol and other psychoactive substances as well as chronic diseases such as asthma, dysentery and tuberculosis. They are affected by sexual and reproductive health problems, including sexual abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancies. These pregnancies are a great threat to the health of street girls and to their babies. While girls suffer a lack of maternal care and adequate nutrition, their babies are seriously prevented from attaining their growth potential.

In addition to physical problems, the prevalence of poor mental health is very high among street children. Psychological problems include living with a stressful past, normally associated with the causes for being on the street, as well as having a transitory lifestyle that impedes them from developing emotional attachments. They are also affected by psychiatric and developmental disorders, including depression, suicidal and anti-social behaviours. Street children are often reluctant to seek help as they are usually confronted with discrimination and view health and social services with suspicion.

Due to the lack of governmental policies addressing these problems, in many countries NGOs have taken on the responsibility of providing health services and access to basic needs of street children.

Mr. President: Several measures could be taken to realize the right of these children to the highest attainable standard of health, as laid down in Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We therefore urge Member States to:

1. Provide comprehensive mobile health care services to children living or working on the street. These services should be free, easy to reach and provided by sensitive and empathetic health care providers.
2. Focus on preventive, curative and promotional aspects of health according to the needs of street children, including provision of adequate nutrition, sexual and reproductive health care, access to care related to substance use, mental health care and the provision of health education.
3. Conduct systematic training programmes and workshops to build capacity of health workers and NGO staff members who provide health services to this group of the population.