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The rights of the child: supporting and strengthening families

Joint Statement: Defence for Children International, Groupe des ONG pour la convention relative aux droits de l'enfant -Child Rights Connect, Plan International, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages International.

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Thank you Mr. President,

This is a joint statement made by the Groupe des ONG pour la convention relative aux droits de l'enfant - Child Rights Connect on behalf of five children's rights organisations.

As expressed in previous statements and submissions, it is critical that the foundation for all debates and decisions in this Council be the respect for the individual rights of children in all forms of families or other caring environments.

On that basis, we reaffirm the legal obligations of States under the CRC to:

- Respect and protect children as individual rights holders in all settings;
- Respect child rights in all forms of families and to ensure, inter alia:
 - non-discrimination against children on the basis of family status
 - respect for the identity rights of children
 - deliver family policies and programmes that reach all children wherever they live.

Neither the CRC, nor the report presented today by OHCHR, provides a fixed or limited definition of "family" thus affirming the concept of "family" as a social construct within which all the rights of all children should be realised.

As a social construct, the concept "family" varies with context involving a wide range of individuals who may, or may not, be biologically related to each other or to the child.

In all configurations, be they legally recognised or de facto, those with responsibility for children must be adequately supported by the State in fulfilling their obligations to children. This must be the primary concern.

To this end, States should empower parents and caregivers with appropriate comprehensive support and, when necessary, tailor strengthening to address specific vulnerabilities.

States are furthermore obliged to protect children from all forms of violence, including within the family setting. In this regard, States also have an obligation, when necessary, to provide suitable alternative care for children.

Finally Mr. President, we therefore urge the Council and States to:

1. Support and strengthen all forms of families to fulfil children's rights, in line with basic principle of non-discrimination against children on any basis.
2. Explicitly acknowledge the broad contextualised nature of "family" and refer to "*all forms of families in different contexts*" in debates and international documents.
3. Reaffirm that all children are individual rights holders whose rights cannot be limited or negated based on family environment or other living arrangement.

Thank you Mr. President,

