

Annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child

Theme: Empowering children with disabilities for the enjoyment of their human rights, including through inclusive education

Thank you Mr President. Plan International would like to deliver this statement on behalf of the undersigned organisations.

According to a report by UNESCO, girls with disabilities are less likely to attend school than boys with disabilities. Despite a strong supporting rights framework and a clear global mandate through Agenda 2030, it remains the case that girls with disabilities face significant barriers to accessing education.

Girls and young women with disabilities are often denied access to comprehensive sexuality education, which is crucial for the realisation of their sexual and reproductive health and rights and to enable them to better negotiate relationships, make informed decisions about their bodies and sexuality and prevent abuse, sexual and gender based violence, including rape and forced sterilization, or unintended or unwanted pregnancy.

Furthermore, the absence of accessible or separate toilets and washing facilities can be a barrier to school attendance and to the education of girls with disabilities in particular. Limited understanding among caregivers and the education community fuelled by stigma and community prejudice are also significant barriers to accessing education opportunities.

It is crucial that we tackle these barriers and challenge the negative gender norms, which prohibit girls with disabilities from accessing and completing a quality education.

The undersigned organisations believe that mainstream education systems can and should be adapted to meet the needs of all learners, and should offer learning opportunities for every child, regardless of gender or disability. Not to do so is to ignore the potential of all children and to violate their basic human rights. Inclusive education which takes into consideration gender and disability, among other factors, has the ability to empower children from a young age and bring better social, academic, health and economic outcomes.

We therefore call on States:

- To address the intersection of gender and disability in educational settings in order to guarantee the optimal participation of children with disabilities.
- To support the education sector in providing teacher training, supervisory support, inclusive pedagogical curricula and setting minimum standards on inclusion to ensure greater understanding and respect for the needs of children with disabilities, in particular girls with disabilities.
- To take specific actions to ensure the availability, accessibility, acceptability and good quality of comprehensive sexuality education for girls with disabilities in both formal and non-formal educational settings.

Thank you Mr President.