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Location: Palais des Nations, Room XXIV

Program: 25rd HRC Side Event
25th Anniversary of the Adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Format: Panel and short video

Organizations: Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, Government of Liechtenstein, Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Confederation Suisse

Speakers: Part 1: President of the Swiss Confederation, H.E. Mr. Didier Burkhalter; State Secretary of Slovenia, Mr. Bogdan Benko; Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Principality of Liechtenstein, H.E. Ms. Aurelia Frick; Ambassador of Austria to the UN in Geneva, H.E. Mr. Thomas Hajnoczi; Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, H.E. Mr. Ivan Simonovic

Moderators: Think Young, Mr. Andrea Gerosa; Swiss Youth Representative 2013, Mr. Roman Twerenbold

For part 1 and as part of the High-Level Segment, the President of the Swiss Confederation, Didier Burkhalter; the Foreign Minister of Liechtenstein, Aurelia Frick; State Secretary Bogdan Benko; the Austrian Representative to the UN in Geneva, Thomas Hajnoczi; and Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, H.E. Mr. Ivan Simonovic gave introductory addresses at the opening of a side event to mark the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child this year.

Mr. Burkhalter opened by explaining that youth and the upcoming generation are one of his three priorities as president of Switzerland this year. His aim is to also motivate upcoming generations to participate and be involved with society.

He explained that Switzerland signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child in May 1991 with subsequent ratifications in 2002 and 2006. Together these measures resulted in adaptations to Swiss national law and the Swiss Constitution where several awareness and prevention campaigns have been organized on the canton and national levels to improve participation of children.

He continued by reporting that, over the years, the situation of children in Switzerland has improved overall but that ensuring the participation of children and the expression of their views remains a challenge. Work continues to create the necessary political will to put children rights in practice.

Burkhalter went on to mention that an estimated 250,000 children are currently associated with armed forces. And that it is of the utmost importance to hold accountable those who commit grave violations against children by creating a strong normative set of standards. Switzerland supports Geneva Call, which conducts dialogues with armed non-state groups and encourages them to sign commitments to prevent and ban recruitment of children for hostilities.

He stressed that early marriage is a serious human rights violation and a form of gender-based violence against women and girls. It violates, among other, rights to education. He went on to explain that Switzerland supports the initiative Media campaign, Stop Early Marriage in Bangladesh. TV and radio spots against early marriage are broadcast nationwide.

Burkhalter concluded by saying that, "The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely acceptable agreement in the field of human rights with almost universal ratification. Let's work together to make it a reality for children worldwide."

Ms. Frick stated that, at 25 years, it is time to celebrate, reflect and continue to recognize rights of the child. She conveyed her joy that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is almost ratified by almost every country in the world.

She said that Committee on the Rights of a Child has been an agent for change for Liechtenstein. Liechtenstein's reporting and guidance in 2009 to the Committee proposed for consideration four questions relating to Article 12 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

What is good for children? What bothers them the most? What should be changed? If wishes were granted what would the children change? Answers revealed that children in Liechtenstein are happy but felt that their concerns were not taken seriously enough. Pursuant of Article 12, she will proceed with discussion of ways and areas in which existing cooperation with relevant bodies could be further strengthened to enhance the promotion and protection of the rights of the child and their feeling of relevance.

Ms. Frick said that even though the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been widely accepted over the past 25 years, that we must not ignore worldwide challenges still here for millions of female children who are subject to sexual violence, abuse in conflict, military areas and early child marriage. She is pleased and supportive of the progress in recent years in increased prosecution of perpetrators.

Mr. Benko reminded that Slovenia adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 suggested continue to adopt it and ratify Amendments.

Since adopting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Slovenia has put into place many measures to implement children's rights and ensure child participation. Some examples are the Resolution on the Foundations of the Formulation of Family Policy in the Republic of Slovenia, new education legislation that regulates the education system, new health and social legislation and numerous other measures relating to the implementation of the civil, political, social and economic rights of children.

The constitution of Slovenia calls for participation in the Children's Parliament.

Armed conflict and child marriage are egregious, more common, universal and, less visible, is the sexual abuse and exploitation of children which occurs around the world behind closed doors. Must increase education and improve means of prosecuting domestic abuse.

Mr. Hajnoczi recognized that the Convention has helped children everywhere. He reported on three of Austria's efforts.

In 2011 Austria passed a law ensuring fundamental rights of children that is enforced by Austria's Constitution.

In 2007, to improve child participation in society, Austria lowered the voting age to 16 from 18. Gives concerns of young people more voice and letting them take part and take responsibility.

In 1989 Austria banned corporal punishment in schools or public institutions. Research shows decrease in violence in children when exposed to less violence so start with school.

Mr. Simonovic said that central to the recognition of children as subjects with rights within the Convention on the Rights of the Child is Article 12 - the right of the child to participate. It is a fundamental right that we are able to participate in decision-making concerning our lives. Though they will be judged depending on age and maturity, it still remains that children cannot be denied the right to participate. Article 12 recognizes the potential of all children to enrich the decision-making processes and participate in change.

He went on to say that Article 12 is one of the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Without hearing the child's voice, it is not possible to determine his or her best interest, which surely must be a primary consideration in all decisions affecting the child. Participation produces benefits for the child such as personal development and enhanced capacity for citizenship.

Mr. Simonovic continued by saying that even after 25 years, it continues to be challenging for governments to truly listen to children namely because they lack competence, knowledge or judgment; that it places too great a burden on them; or that it exposes them to risk of harm. But, he said, children who do not have a voice cannot claim their rights.

The film, *Listen to Children's Voices*, was provided by World Vision. The short film showed life stories of children whose lives were enriched because they had a voice that was heard.

This ended Part 1.

Part 2 was to be an expert discussion on the same topic. I did not stay to cover this last piece.

Summary and how the side event relates to FAWCO

All panelists agreed that it is time to celebrate the Convention on the Rights of the Child and also to continue reporting efforts to improve participation of children. Also at the side event there was varied reference to a handbook entitled, *"Together With Children for Children. A guide for NGOs accompanying children in CRC reporting,"* published by the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The intent of the guide is to provide a practical guide for NGOs to facilitate children's engagement in all aspects of the Committee on the Rights of the Child reporting process. The guidelines are based on experiences of NGOs and children, and explore issues NGOs will need to take into consideration when supporting and promoting children's involvement. The guidelines have been drafted as a result of the collaboration of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and an international advisory group of NGOs and children.

Available separately is, *“My Pocket Guide to CRC Reporting.”* This booklet is a companion guide for children and adolescents willing to tell the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child how children’s rights are respected in their country.

The above mentioned reference guides along with panelists discussions support FAWCO’s endorsement of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and our participation with other NGOs. I suggest we explore a possible relationship with the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They are followed in the USA and could be a possible alliance for us.

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