UN Committee on the Rights of the Child calls on states to take action in first guidance on children's rights and the environment, with a focus on climate change

Monday 28 August, 2023

Today, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child published authoritative guidance to States on what they must do to uphold children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. In the face of the deepening climate crisis, the Committee specified obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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GENEVA/NEW YORK - For the first time, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has explicitly affirmed the children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, issuing comprehensive interpretation of Member States' obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This Convention, created in 1989 and ratified by 196 states, outlines universal children's rights such as the right to life, survival and development, and the right to health. A General Comment provides legal guidance on what these rights imply for a specific topic or area of legislation. The now published "General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change", explicitly addresses the climate emergency, the collapse of biodiversity and pervasive pollution, outlining countermeasures to protect the lives and life perspectives of children.

General Comment No. 26 specifies that States are responsible not only for protecting children's rights from immediate harm, but also for foreseeable violations of their rights in the future due to States' acts — or failure to act — today. Furthermore, it underlines that States can be held accountable not only for environmental harm occurring within their borders, but also for the harmful impacts of environmental damage and climate change beyond their borders.

The 196 States that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child are urged to take immediate action including organizing the phase out of coal, oil and natural gas and shifting to renewable energy sources, improving air quality and ensuring access to clean water, transforming industrial agriculture and fisheries to produce healthy and sustainable food, and protecting biodiversity.

Notes to Editors:

PLEASE FIND THE FULL PRESS RELEASE IN THE PDF DOCUMENT ATTACHED.

General Comment No. 26 will be available here: https://ots.de/epGybb

Child-friendly versions of General Comment No. 26 will be published on 18 September 2023 as part of the official launch of the General Comment during the Committee's forthcoming session in Geneva, Switzerland.

More information about General Comment No. 26 can be found at: childrightsenvironment.org

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