



Statement

By

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Signing Ceremony for the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a  
Communications Procedure

Geneva

28 February 2012

Prime Minister Radičová,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Dear colleagues,

It is a great privilege to be invited to speak today on behalf of the coalition of NGOs that have actively campaigned for this new Optional Protocol and I wish to thank the organisers for this opportunity.

Today's ceremony, above all, marks a historic step forward for children and their rights. This Optional Protocol will give much greater meaning to the rights which children have under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This Convention is the most widely ratified of all the human rights treaties, a powerful signal indeed of States' commitment to the rights of their children. But for rights to have meaning, they must be supported by effective remedies when violations occur. States are already required to provide such remedies at domestic level, but when these remedies fail, it is crucial that some method of international redress is available. This, above all else, is the key purpose of the new Optional Protocol. For the first time, when children are denied any of their rights, they will have the opportunity to seek a remedy before an international body. When children are denied the right to a nationality, or even a name, when they are denied the right to freedom of expression, or when they are denied the right to protection from abuse, they will have an opportunity to seek redress through the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

I wish to thank Slovakia for its leadership in guiding us to where we are today. When a coalition of child rights NGOs began lobbying for a third Optional Protocol to the CRC almost 6 years ago, the response we had from States was disappointing. Some individual diplomats did give us encouragement and I wish to acknowledge those who are with us today. But no State saw this as enough of a priority to bring a formal proposal to the Human Rights Council until Slovakia took the lead on this all important initiative.

Today's ceremony also constitutes a great achievement for the child rights community. The drafting of the Protocol owed a great deal to the tireless efforts of child rights organisations throughout the world, which worked both in their respective countries and in Geneva. I wish to pay tribute to my colleagues, our members and partner organisations, and to the individuals behind this work. Our efforts were all worthwhile.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the States which are about to sign the Protocol today. But this is only the beginning. We call on all States to follow their lead and promptly sign and ratify this new human rights treaty.

Our common goal is that this new Protocol, like the Convention itself, will soon enjoy near universal ratification and that States will once again demonstrate their commitment to upholding the rights of their children by becoming parties. We look forward to working with those States which share this vision in order to turn it into reality.

Thank you.