

*Statement by H.E. Andrei Dapkiunas,
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus*

*Interactive Panel Discussion “Children’s rights through the perspective
of the SDGs: friendly and smart sustainable cities as an essential
condition for ensuring the effective enjoyment of the rights of the child”*

*February 26, 2019
10.00-12.00 a.m., room XXII*

Excellences,
Distinguished panellists and participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to express our gratitude to the co-organizers of this important event – Ms. Afshan Khan from UNICEF, Ms. Olga Algayerova from UNECE and Mr. Chaesub Lee from ITU.

Today’s panel is dedicated to the topic, which is not a new one but will be discussed for the first time through the perspective of the activities of different UN agencies.

We placed the focus of our discussion on the child’s rights for many reasons. And one of them is the 30th Anniversary of the adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which will be widely celebrated this year.

Why do we think that **there is the need to pay more attention to creating friendly environment for children and adolescents in the context of urban development**, especially in the era of new technologies?

According to the current estimates, the proportion of the urban population in the world in relation to rural one is growing from year to year. By 2050, the world’s urban population is expected to nearly double and to reach 6.5 billion. Population, economic activities, social and cultural interactions are increasingly concentrated in the cities. They generate over 80 per cent of global GDP and are increasingly considered engines to achieve development.

According to the UNICEF’s estimations, almost 70 per cent of the world’s children will live in urban areas, many of them in slums.

But cities can present great opportunities and hope for a better life, including for children. These include, among others, the creation of an enabling environment **for the life, growth and all-inclusive development**

of the child.

The governments, UN agencies and other stakeholders **can play a bigger role** in this sphere.

As for governments, the creation of an enabling environment for children **is an essential part of their activities on the implementation of international obligations.**

These commitments arise primarily from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

According to Article 27 of the CRC, States recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. To implement these rights and in case of need States provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

In another words, States are obliged to ensure child's rights, the **effectiveness of implementation of which depends on many factors, including on the creation of the necessary environment in the cities and sustainable urban development.**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes the goal 11, which is *"make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable"*. Other targets may also be mentioned in this context:

- ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums;
- provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, **children**, persons with disabilities and older persons;
- reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management;
- provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and **children**, older persons and persons with disabilities.

Taking into account the fact that states integrate the SDGs into their

national strategies and policies, we believe that **there are greater opportunities for strengthening national strategies for creating cities friendly to children and adolescents.**

This work is important. Modern urban trends pose sustainability challenges in terms of housing, infrastructure, basic services, food security, health, education, decent jobs, safety and natural resources. Other challenges affect the urban poor, particularly those living in slums, and they include, among others, overcrowding and inadequate sanitation systems, which facilitate the transmission of diseases.

A number of the UN funds and agencies, within their mandates, launched and are implementing initiatives and programmes that directly or indirectly concern the rights of children. Among them there should be noted, first of all, the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiatives and the joint ITU and UNECE initiative as well as 14 other entities – United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC).

Despite the availability of relevant initiatives and programmes, **there is always room for improvement of coordination and synergy in the current activity of different agencies and stakeholders in terms of ensuring the best interests of the child.**

Therefore, we see today's event as a **platform for the exchange of views** between experts of the UN agencies and other organizations on **how to better take into account the interests of children in the context of urban development**, including in the areas related to urban planning, increasing the number of green zones, reducing carbon emissions, as well as ensuring reduction in road deaths among children and establishment of safe transport networks.

I would also like to invite panellists and participants to share their thoughts on **how to improve the coordination of efforts between agencies to achieve the SDGs in terms of the rights of the child.**

I thank you for attention.