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General Comment 26 launched in the Pacific

UN Child Rights Committee meets with Pacific children and governments to share new guidance on children and environment

Apia, 20th November 2023 – On the occasion of World Children’s Day, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child launched its new guidance on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change, together with children and representatives of Pacific Island Countries. Known as General Comment No. 26 (GC26), the guidance explicitly addresses the climate emergency and the related obligations of States to protect the lives and wellbeing of children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Speaking at the launch was 12-year-old Kyannalei Ah Liki, who shared the value of the General Comment 26 as she reflected on her personal experiences with natural disasters in Samoa. “I am still young, and I do not want the effect of climate change to ruin my childhood. We can never solve the problem of the impacts of climate change. However, we can take action to minimize the impact of climate change,” said Kyannalei in her opening remarks.

In the Pacific, climate hazards and environmental degradation are already altering the health and wellbeing of children. Moreover, children are uniquely and disproportionately vulnerable to pollution, deadly diseases, and extreme weather. Yet children’s rights, unique needs for special protection and investment and their perspectives have often been absent in climate policies, action and investment.

Another child, 11-year-old Semisi Ioane has called policy makers to “make things right”. In sharing his thoughts Semisi said “We need to set things right for children of the future. Don’t do it for us, do it for them so that our children can have as the title said - a clean, happy, healthy and safe environment for them to live in.”

This now changes with the launch of the GC26 which took place this morning in Apia, at the Regional Experience sharing workshop on implementing the recommendations of the UN Committee.

Speaking to a room full of children at the launch, the Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Ms Ann Skelton emphasized the importance of ensuring children’s voices are included when forming climate related policies. In her address, Ms Skelton reminded stakeholders that children will be on this planet longer than adults and therefore any action must consider their future.

“General Comment 26 conveys the message to the states, business and to all of us that we must find shared solutions because we all live on this planet and there is only one planet earth,” said Ms Skelton. “I am very delighted that we are here where the

reality of climate change is real and therefore it is significant and meaningful that we launch GC26 in the Pacific on World Children's Day."

The need for clear action on child rights and the climate crisis is further strengthened by the comprehensive guidance for states to act, as clarified by *United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 'General Comment No. 26 (2023) on Children's Rights and the Environment with a Special Focus on Climate Change'*. Leaders are therefore encouraged to ensure child rights are prominent in COP28 outcomes so that the rights and needs of children are respected, promoted and considered in all aspects of climate action, in line with Paris Agreement commitments.

Children's health and wellbeing are threatened by climate change, diseases, air pollution and extreme weather events. In addition, the scarcity of drinking water adds layers to their vulnerability.

General Comment No. 26 assists in interpreting States' commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child to respect, protect and fulfil their child rights obligations when taking action to address climate change and environmental degradation. It also makes it clear that child rights impact assessments must be undertaken for all environment-related legislation, policies and projects, regulations, budget or other decisions. States will be expected to report periodically to the UN Committee on relevant progress they have made in protecting children's environmental rights.

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For images please click the following

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About UN Samoa Multi-Country Office

The UN Multi-Country Office in Samoa serves the Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, and Tokelau. Led by the Resident Coordinator, it convenes and coordinates over 15 UN agencies that form the UN Country Team Samoa working collaboratively on joint development programmes aligned to complement and support national development

priorities of the Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, and Tokelau. From 2023 to 2027, the UNCT Samoa development support will be guided by the newly endorsed UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, outlining the vision, actions, and resources of the UNCT Samoa to contribute to a sustainable planet, where all the people of these four island states thrive prosperously and living in peace.

About SPC

The Pacific Community (SPC) is the principal scientific and technical organisation in the Pacific region, proudly supporting development since 1947. We are an international development organisation owned and governed by our 27 country and territory members. SPC supports sustainable development by applying a people-centred approach to science, research and technology across all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We serve our members by interweaving and harnessing the nexus of climate, ocean, land, culture, rights and good governance; through trusted partnerships; investing in Pacific people; and understanding Pacific contexts. For more information on SPC's work in the Pacific region visit the [SPC website](#)