General Comment on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment

## Submission from the Peaceful Actions Platform to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 15th November 2020

## Submitting Organization:

Peaceful Actions is a European grassroots platform, established by several civil society organizations, who joined forces in order to build a collective momentum, raise awareness and take action for human rights.

Believing that no one is free when others are oppressed, Peaceful Actions aims to be the voice for victims of human rights violations and to develop a network of local partners operating around the world to promote human rights.

Both through expanding our existing partnerships of different human rights organizations, and building a wider network of grassroots organizations, we are keen to connect organizations and initiatives around the world who have the shared aim of defending human rights and building sustainable peace.

Through our network, we highlight the work of local peacebuilders to raise the profile of their work, connect them with other like-minded organizations, and to share their insights with a wider international community.

Peaceful Actions Platform welcomes this opportunity to submit observations and comments to the proposed General Comment on Children’s Rights in the Digital Environment.

## General Remarks:

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989. Even though states have made significant improvements in implementing the rights of the child in the last 30 years, children still remain disempowered and silenced leaving us a long way to go. There are still those who must be convinced that children’s rights are actually human rights. The ongoing Covid-19 process and the measures that states take to fight it pose specific challenges for the full enjoyment of the rights of children.

Without a doubt, children and young people are at the forefront of the rapid change in the digital environment, often using and interacting with new technologies before many adults do. The access to digital media is as a way for children to freely express themselves, to participate and to have their voices heard, to learn and take part in cultural life. That´s why, **it is of significant importance and an essential mean to fulfil their rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).**

Keeping in mind, that any kind of policy or intervention to protect children should not hinder their access to the opportunities which are offered by technology, we should ensure the **children´s right of participation** in policies, platform and other processes that affect them.

To sum it up, technology is clearly an integral and inescapable part of children’s lives. In order to prevent the disproportional risks, the digital space must provide mechanisms of protection that take children’s age and evolving capabilities into account while retaining their right to unrestricted freedom of expression and information. Interacting with and gaining feedback from peers is important for children’s identity development, and this can be fostered through the internet. Yet, the access to digital content involves risks for children and therefore the digital world must be regulated in a child-friendly manner.

## Specific Remarks:

*to A 10:*

States should take all necessary measures to lower the cost of connectivity, provide free access to children deprived of liberty and invest in policies and programmes that support that **children deprived of liberty are enabled to use digital technologies**, to overcome inequalities and improve digital inclusion.

Furthermore, a global initiative should be started immediately to ensure the rights of children deprived of liberty, as well as, children affected by war.

*to C 17:*

Especially mentioning children affected of war and and children, who are deprived of liberty, will be more inclusive and clear.

*to B 26:*

Through the series of events, „Strengthening Children: Realizing the Rights and Potential of Every Child”, we want to address five broad issues as priorities in these challenging times:

1. Participation of Children and Young People in Decision Making Processes
2. The Children that are Deprived of Liberty
3. Protection of Children in Migration
4. Preventing and Ending Childhood Statelessness
5. Children´s Rights in the Context of the Digital World

The series of webinars will commence with a launch event that will help us set the framework and identify the overall situation regarding children rights – we will shed light on the status quo and get an insight from different perspectives on the topics we will discuss in the series.

The first event will be followed by five more panel discussions and a closing event on the World Children´s Day. Each panel will aim to highlight the gaps and challenges in the aforementioned areas where children’s rights are affected. Several practitioners, experts and academics will share their opinion and expertise.

## Panel 1: Participation of Children and Young People in Decision Making Processes

The capacity of each society to progress is based, among other elements, on its ability to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of children and youth in the designing and building of their future. Children and Young People bring unique perspectives with broad diversity which needs to be taken into account. Therefore, there is a pressing need to involve children as research agents, open space for their voices, and seek innovative ways and methods to promote children’s participation.

## Panel 2: The Children Deprived of Liberty

The Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges states to ensure that no child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. Detention or imprisonment should only be used as a last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time. Yet in reality, detention is often used as the first response to a number of perceived problems rather than the last, leaving the alternatives underutilized. The children that are deprived of liberty largely belong to groups where they are already vulnerable or remain on the margins of society. Therefore, they require particular attention to secure the promotion and protection of their rights, including those who reside in prisons with their parents or caregivers, the ones under house arrest and those who are separated from their parents or caregivers by incarceration

## Panel 3: Protection of Children in Migration

As children in migration are exposed to high risks of violence, trafficking and exploitation along migration routes, or they end up missing or separated from their families, they require a specific protection. Children have the right to be protected, in line with relevant provisions of EU law, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and with international law on the rights of the child. According to these charters, the **child's best interests** must be the primary consideration in all actions and decisions concerning children.

According to UNICEF, by the end of 2018, there were 31 million displaced children worldwide and one in every 8 international migrants is a child. In 2019, European countries recorded 202,945 children as new asylum seekers. 17,735 of these children were observed to be unaccompanied or separated from their families while seeking asylum in Europe. Since the children comprise a significant portion of refugees and migrants, there is a pressing need of concerted collective effort to ensure their best interests.

## Panel 4: Preventing and Ending Childhood Statelessness

Stateless children are born into a world in which they will face a lifetime of discrimination; their status profoundly affects their ability to learn and grow, and to fulfil their ambitions and dreams for the future.

With a stateless child being born somewhere in the world at least every 10 minutes, this is a problem that is growing. In countries hosting the 20 largest stateless populations, at least 70,000 stateless children are born each year. In this panel, we will discuss how not being recognized as a national of any country can create insurmountable barriers to basic rights and freedoms.

## Panel 5: Children´s Rights in the Context of the Digital World