**Comment on the concept note of**

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

**the Committee on the Rights of the Child**

*Japan Committee for UNICEF, May 2019*

**1. Children’s views and experiences**

The Japan Committee for UNICEF believes it is extremely important to reflect children’s views and experiences in formulating policies and guidelines on digital environment including the General Comment, as they are the ones most affected and at the same time, often more knowledgeable than adults about the issues as well as the solutions.

For that end, the Japan Committee is planning to organize a series of children’s workshop called “UNICEF Smartphone Summit” between October 2019 and February 2020, at several locations in the country, aiming to generate a set of recommendations from children on realising children’s rights in the digital environment. The workshops will be in a peer-to-peer discussion among children (between 13 and 17) to be supported by the youth facilitators (university students), and not in a way ‘experts teaching children’. Recommendations from children will be later discussed with a group of adults including from the government and ICT industry.

We strongly hope that there will be an opportunity to provide the outcomes of the workshops as inputs to the General Comment, at a later stage. Issues to be discussed in the workshops include those listed in the section 3. below.

**2. Role of the business sector**

The role of the business sector as well as the importance of cooperation among various stakeholders including the government and business sector should be properly emphasized and elaborated in the General Comment.

As examples of laws and programmes, Japan’s “Act on Development of an Environment that Provides Safe and Secure Internet Use for Young People”, introduced in 2009, stipulates the responsibility of the business sector in reducing access by young people to harmful contents online, and promoting responsible use of internet. Based on the Act, the “Third Basic Plan on Measures for Providing Safe and Secure Internet Use for Young People” [[1]](#footnote-1) formulated in July 2015 sets out the obligation of mobile phone operators in providing filtering, and promotes industry-led initiatives to incorporate the protection of children from product/service design stage[[2]](#footnote-2).

As for the business-led initiatives in realising children’s rights in the digital environment, the Japanese ICT industry offers some good examples. Initiatives to address sexual exploitation of children, including blocking of child abuse images online, can be found in para 42-48 of the “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography on her visit to Japan” (A/HRC/31/58/Add.1)[[3]](#footnote-3). The Japan Internet Safety Promotion Association[[4]](#footnote-4) is another industry-led association, where various stakeholders including the ICT companies, educational institutions and researchers are working together to promote safer internet use and digital literacy among children.

**3. Issues to be included in the General Comment**

We suggest that the following issues, among others, are covered in the General Comment:

* Access to information and freedom of expression: including online fraud/theft, ‘fake news’ and ‘flaming’, both in terms of children as recipients and as actors
* Protection from violence: including grooming for sexual exploitation, child-produced indecent images and cyberbullying
* Health and wellbeing: including digital dependency
* Positive use of ICTs, digital literacy

1. “Third Basic Plan on Measures for Providing Safe and Secure Internet Use for Young People”, 2015 <https://www8.cao.go.jp/youth/youth-harm/suisin/pdf/dai3ji_keikaku_eng.pdf> (The latest is the Fourth Basic Plan formulated in 2018 but no English translation available yet.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Japan Committee for UNICEF provided information on the Children’s Rights and Business Principles and the UNICEF-ITU Guidelines for Industry on Child Online Protection during the process of the formulation of the Plan. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/041/73/PDF/G1604173.pdf?OpenElement

   ‘UNICEF’ in para 43 should be read as ‘the Japan Committee for UNICEF’. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.good-net.jp/english/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)