

**Second Session of the Forum on Minority Issues
Minorities and Effective Political Participation**

UNICEF, 12 November 2009

Madam Chairperson,

UNICEF is pleased to address the Forum on Minority Issues at its second session.

Minority children are among the most marginalized and vulnerable children in the world, as they often are the most exposed to various forms of discrimination. This is reflected in their lack of political participation. Their marginalization as minorities, for example by not being able to access information due to language barriers, presents an obstacle to their participation. They furthermore face the barrier of children having traditionally been excluded from decision-making processes throughout the world.

Changing this is key to the realization of their rights. This is particularly pertinent as we look toward this year's 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as an opportunity to redouble our efforts to promote the effective political participation of minority children. The CRC – particularly its Article 2 on non-discrimination and Article 12 on the right to be heard – can be used as a tool to understand and challenge discrimination against minority children, and to promote their right to be included in political processes that range from child and youth parliaments, youth forums and children's councils at national and municipal levels, to participatory budgeting, participatory child rights monitoring, audits of public services, and children and youth participation in the management of local institutions.

There are practical examples of this principle's application. For example, recently in Kosovo 500 young people, including ethnic minorities, participated in the development of a youth action plan. This plan will serve as a platform for government and civil society to improve the lives of young people (including ethnic minorities) through a set of interventions in thematic areas, which include participation as a priority. In Albania, UNICEF supported the participation of youth from marginalized groups including Roma in a series of trainings with Youth Parliaments. This has led to greater participation of Albanian youth, including Roma, in public debates, and has thus enabled minority children to bring their opinions to decision makers.

Madam Chairperson,

Considering the magnitude of discrimination that minority children face, and the impact of this discrimination on their rights and lives, all of us, both inside the UN system and without, must be prepared to do more. As Wutor Mahama Baleng, a 17 year old child participation advocate from Ghana stated some weeks ago in New York, children are not only the future, they are also the present. They are citizens of the world in which we all live. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we must increase our efforts to ensure that the voices of all children, including minority children, are heard.

Thank you.