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| Contribution by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child | |
| EXPLORING THE ITU COOPERATION WITH THE CRC | |
| **Purpose**  Sharing the information for ITU members about the collaboration with the CRC and the initiative of the Joint Statement of on Child Rights in the context of artificial inteligence.  **Action required**  This document is transmitted to the Council Working Group on child online protection **for information**. | |

In October of last year, I reported to the Member States and the Working Group on child online protection of the ITU about the newly established excellent collaboration between the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Telecommunications Union. Those who were attending that meeting might remember that in September 2024, we had an event held in Geneva at Palais Wilson, which served as an official beginning of the cooperation between ITU and the CRC while sharing specifics on each other’s work on the topic of artificial intelligence (AI) and child rights.

As a follow-up to the event, I came up with the idea to elaborate a Joint Statement on Child Rights in the context of AI, which will fill the existing gap in the field. We see a lot of movements all over the world on the topic of AI. However, joint efforts focused on children are less, and as usual, children are left behind.

I would like to use this opportunity and thank the ITU team for its excellent collaboration and for expanding its work on the topic of child rights in the online environment, including in the context of Artificial Intelligence. They took the initiative to coordinate and lead the process which I find exceptional and very much dedicated to children.

The process is supported by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which created a special Working Group for AI and child rights.

Now let me zoom in on the Joint Statement on AI and Child Rights.

Currently, there are no specific international legal norms addressing child rights in relation to AI. Much like the early days of the Internet, AI was not originally developed with children and their well-being in mind. When the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was drafted, not only was AI absent from consideration, but its very concept had yet to emerge as a tangible idea. While the preamble of General Comment No. 25 (2021) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child acknowledges AI in the context of children's rights in the digital environment, specific issues related to AI remain unexplored within its text. Moreover, national approaches to regulating AI and child rights differ significantly, creating fragmented protections. This underscores the pressing need for a harmonized global framework and collaboration among stakeholders to protect children and ensure the realization of their rights in the AI era.

The Joint Statement aims to serve as the first joint effort of several international organizations dedicated to promoting and protecting child rights in relation to AI, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. For the CRC, it will help us to have some guidance on how we can better support State Parties in Constructive Dialogue addressing the most recent developments in the field of AI.

The elaboration of the Joint Statement is an inclusive process. There are 8 international organizations as co-signatories already: CRC, the process is coordinated by the International Telecommunications Union, UNICRI Center for AI and Robotics, UNODC, UNESCO, SRSG Violence Against Children are part of it and the Council of Europe has joined the process as well.

Certainly, State Parties involvement is very important and I use the opportunity to invite all the state parties to contribute. It is crucial to have the national perspective of States who are willing to contribute as much as possible and from all 5 regions of the United Nations. But certainly, we will come to you separately on this issue.

The Process is inclusive, and the business sector, including AI developer companies and social media companies, is involved, but also academia and civil society organizations.

Child participation is crucial in this process, especially since the voices of children from all 5 regions of the UN are represented and from countries to the maximum extent possible.

The substantial discussion on the Joint Statement will happen at the Conference in Tbilisi on 10-12 March 2025, which will bring all stakeholders together, including children. Again, all the State Parties are more than welcome to participate either in person or online and contribute. It is our desire to have a document on which all the stakeholders agree and which is acceptable for all in order to guarantee the best future for the children of the world.

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