Thank you Mr Chair,

I am honoured to be here today for this ground-breaking meeting on such an important, but often overlooked, topic.

Linking children’s rights and the environment is key to unlocking the underlying causes of numerous violations.

For a long time, Terre des Hommes has been working to realise children’s rights in 69 countries. We traditionally focused on some of the most vulnerable children, including children in armed conflicts, migrant children, indigenous and working children.

Yet, our partner organisations kept on raising a major underlying issue that contributed to the plight of these children: the environment. The exposure to toxicants of children working in mining and agriculture, the depletion of natural resources forcing people to migrate to the cities, injustices related to land rights and access to water, or the destruction of entire ecosystems and the loss of cultural identity. We originally framed the issues affecting children in different terms, but the common thread of the environment kept on coming back. It became clear for us: if we do not address the environmental issues, we will always fall short in realising children’s rights.

This realisation is what motivated us, at Terre des Hommes, to advocate for today’s Day of General Discussion to focus on children’s rights and the environment.

Given recent international agreements, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Paris Agreement, the DGD is timely. While these agreements did not go as far as we would have liked, they provide a unique chance to integrate a human rights approach. As world leaders conclude such agreements, they often emphasise their commitment to the children of today and future generations. Yet, the reality is that the CRC is, by-and-large, overlooked in setting and implementing environmental policies and standards. For that to change, we need to clarify what it means concretely for environmental policies to be based on the norms of the CRC.
The DGD provides an opportunity to break new ground. Not many of us in the child rights community know much about environmental policies or standards. We need to reach out to our colleagues working on environmental issues. This needs to be done at both policy level and local level. For instance, development organisations working with children should support environmental projects involving children and youth. Practical tools are greatly needed to guide responsible authorities and the business sector in integrating a child rights approach in environmental policies or impact assessments.

The DGD provides one of the first opportunities to discuss the link between environmental harm and children’s rights: not just the explicit rights on health and education, but all the implicit rights of the Convention.

In our discussions today and beyond, let’s be bold and formulate requirements that live up to the environmental challenges children face. We should develop a positive vision of respect for the natural environment that allows children to thrive in accordance with the CRC.

When we address environmental harm that can have lifelong, irreversible and even transgenerational consequences, we must focus on strengthening precautionary and preventive approaches. At the same time, we should not ignore that when rights are violated, children too often are denied access to effective remedy. Accountability is key to rights-based solutions. We should therefore emphasize States and other actors’, including the business sector, clear responsibilities to protect children from environmental harm.

We believe that children are particularly vulnerable to environmental harm, but also powerful actors to achieve sustainable change. They are part of the solution and we must listen carefully to their views, if we want to protect the planet for them and future generations. To make informed decisions they need access to child-friendly environmental information and education. During our discussions today, we should reflect on what it means to develop children’s understanding and knowledge of environmental issues as a child right.

We, at Terre des Hommes, work with children on children’s rights and the environment in our many national programmes. We therefore wanted to ensure that their views are part of the conference. As you will see, they are present throughout the day, including in this joint introductory statement, which they would like to deliver now.

Thank you very much!