Statement by Ambassador Valentine Rugwabiza,
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Rwanda to the United Nations

at the UN General Assembly High-level Meeting marking the ‘Thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Celebration of World Children’s Day’

20th November 2019
United Nations General Assembly Hall, NYHQ
Mr. President,

My delegation is pleased to participate in this important meeting of the General Assembly as we mark the **Thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child**. Indeed, the manner in which we treat our children should be a mirror through which we get a glimpse of the quality of the future societies we are building. It is therefore an opportune time to reflect, collectively with fellow Member States of the United Nations, on the progress made and challenges that remain with regards to the full protection of the rights of the child.

My statement will cover the following elements:

1. **I will provide an overview of the policy and institutional framework in Rwanda established to protect and promote children’s rights.**

2. **I will highlight some achievements Rwanda has made with regards to the protection and promotion of children’s rights.**

3. **I will touch on a few areas that we can improve on to ensure the full protection of the rights of the child.**

Mr. President,

When Rwanda ratified the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)* in 1991, the country was going through a difficult social and political period which culminated in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, where
children faced unimaginable challenges. A UNICEF commissioned study in 1997 on the promotion and protection of children’s rights in post-Genocide Rwanda, aptly titled ‘Starting from Zero’, highlighted the desperate situation at the time with regards to issues of psycho-social needs of children who were traumatized, the difficult task of family reunification, and meeting the basic needs of children. Since then, led by a strong and consistent political will towards uniting the country and protecting the rights of all citizens, Rwanda has demonstrated a strong commitment to children’s rights including establishing a robust set of policy and institutional interventions. The results have been greatly beneficial to children; we have seen significant reduction of child mortality rates, increased rates of primary school enrollment, and the active participation of children in decision making.

Let me list few examples of our policy, legal, and institutional framework:

1. **The establishment of the National Commission for Children in 2011**, an independent organ established under the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, tasked with oversight of all child related interventions through local government structures and non-government institutions, with an overall objective of giving Rwanda’s children the opportunity to enjoy their rights and to develop into productive and responsible citizens.

3. **The implementation of the Integrated Child Rights Policy**, which was developed to ensure the coordination of all policies related to children and ensure their effective implementation. This key policy is based on seven main guiding principles:

   1) Every child matters.
   2) Children are a priority.
   3) Children deserve the best.
   4) Children can and should participate in decision making.
   5) Abuse, exploitation and violence against children is intolerable.
   6) Government and duty-bearers are accountable.
   7) All aspects of government ought to coordinate to implement this integration policy.

4. **Rwanda has a set of child-sensitive policies & strategic plans**, including (to name a few):

   1) Orphans and Vulnerable Children’s Strategic Plan (2007);
   2) Early Childhood Development Policy (2016);
   3) Child Online Protection Policy (2019);
5. **Rwanda has also ratified a number of key conventions (to name a few):**

1) Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991);
2) Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the elimination of the Worst forms of Child Labor;

**Mr. President,**

Since ratifying the CRC, and through implementing the aforementioned set of policies, my government has registered a number of achievements in line with the key principles of the CRC. To list a few:

1. Rwanda has ensured that **birth registration is guaranteed for all citizens**, including ensuring that a birth certificate can be obtained through an online platform, and recently, introducing an e-registration system that will be rolled out in all public health facilities.

2. The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda upholds the family as a natural foundation of the society. In 2012, the Government of Rwanda adopted a landmark **National Strategy for Child Care** to transform the current child care and protection system into a family-based system to allow children living in child care institutions to be situated in a safe,
loving and supportive family environment. To implement this, the Government of Rwanda in partnership with UNICEF has developed a national framework- ‘Tubarere My Muryango’ (‘Let us raise children in families’) that operationalized the key objectives of this strategy. To date, 95% of children without biological families have been placed in alternative family arrangements. We are currently working towards ensuring the reintegration of children with disabilities.

3. **In the health sector**, 99% of children under five are immunized and 84% of households are covered with our national health insurance scheme. The Government of Rwanda is also investing in increasing the number of health centers and community health workers around the country.

4. **In education**, net enrolment has drastically increased as a result of sustained reforms and pro-poor policies reaching 97.3% for boys and 98% for girls. Rwanda has one of the highest primary school enrollment rates in Africa (97%) and as a result, Rwanda has nearly reached the SDG targets related to access to primary education.

5. **Children’s participation** is an integral pillar of the CRC, which recognizes children as active rights holders and participants in their own development rather than passive recipients of adult protective care.
Rwanda has prioritized the participation of children in national policies and programs. At the National level, my government has established the ‘Annual Children’s Summit’ which provides an opportunity for children to engage and discuss issues affecting their lives and to ensure that children’s opinions and concerns are considered in national policies and programs. As we speak, this year’s summit is being held in Kigali to mark the 30th Anniversary of the CRC.

Mr. President,

While major progress has been seen with regards to child protection in Rwanda and beyond, there are some areas that need improvement, such as:

1. Improving access to quality healthcare and education for all, especially the most disadvantaged children;

2. Harmonizing legal protections in labor laws;

3. Improving the protection of children from violence, neglect, exploitation and abuse, including ensuring that children who face abuse have access to mental health counselling and medical services;

4. At a global level, it is unfortunate that recent data from the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict indicate an increase in the number of verified cases of violations against children. We note that
protracted conflicts, the intensification of combat situations, new conflict dynamics and operational tactics, combined with widespread disregard for international humanitarian and human rights, have all had a devastating effect on children. Underpinning these critical issues is the vulnerability caused by poverty which leads to child recruitment and use in conflict situations. This highlights the importance of the complementarity of strategies related to security, development, human rights and humanitarian issues, which combined can help address the impact of armed conflict on children in a sustainable and comprehensive manner.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, let me thank the United Nations entities that are doing important work to protect child rights worldwide, and the numerous civil society and NGO’s that do much needed work on the ground to supplement government initiatives.

Rwanda is committed to ensuring that our children are fully empowered to become responsible citizens, with the wisdom and capabilities to start very early to work together to find solutions to global issues that are already impacting them.

I thank you for your kind attention