**A Guide for Adults Attending the 84th Extraordinary session of the**

**Committee on the Rights of the Child and its Side Events**

*Samoa, 2-6th March 2020*

**Empowering and Protecting Child Participants**

The participants of the Committee on the Rights of the Child’s 84th Extraordinary session in Samoa will include many children with a range of ages under 18. Adults will include Committee members, UN staff, civil society actors, representatives of human rights institutions and ombudspersons, government officials and others.

There will be many shared spaces between children and adults throughout the entire five days, such as lunchtime events and thematic discussions (for example on climate change and the 30th anniversary of the Convention).

**We want to make sure that children are empowered to participate actively and on an equal footing with adults.** To do so, we have listed below some key areas of feedback and recommendations from children who have participated in different UN events, which have been given to [Child Rights Connect](https://www.childrightsconnect.org), on how adults can help ensure safe, meaningful, empowering and enjoyable participation of children.

1. **USE ACCESSIBLE LANGUAGE –** *Children repeatedly tell us that language used by adults at the UN is very technical and difficult to understand, and that using more accessible child-friendly language can empower them to follow discussions and feel able to participate actively.* *This relates to all settings, including when adults are speaking on a panel, facilitating discussions, asking questions/giving comments or talking to children during the breaks.*
* Make a conscious effort to adapt the language you use to make sure it is not too technical. Try to use less words and not overcomplicate.
* You can use simple language without talking down to children – make sure that you respect their views and opinions in the same way as adults.
* Speak slowly.
* Respond to your audience and if children are looking confused or bored, try to re-phrase and re-adapt the language you are using.
* Avoid any acronyms.
* Remember you can remind other adults about using child-friendly language and help them!
* If a question or comment from a child is unclear, you could reflect back the elements you did understand and then encourage them by taking the time to explore what they want to say. Work with what you have and try not to make the child feel intimidated or ‘on the spot.’
1. **BE SENSITIVE & GIVE ENCOURAGEMENT –** *Children have told us that UN meetings are not child-friendly spaces and that they often feel intimidated and overwhelmed in such formal settings and procedures. Children have suggested that being sensitive to a child’s feelings and encouraging them can help them to feel empowered and respected.*
* Remember that this is the first time at the UN for most of the children participating and that the formalities are not familiar to them. Give time for children to feel comfortable and offer support if you sense they are confused and need help.
* If children appear nervous, try to support them with encouraging comments, like ‘it is great to hear your opinion and you explained really well your idea that …’ or ‘your very interesting experience helps us to now think about…’
* Crucially, remember to thank them for their participation.
* Be careful about the way you phrase a comment or question which could be perceived differently. For example, ‘I can’t believe you didn’t have notes!’ could be a compliment to their ability to talk on a certain topic, but it might be taken as ‘you should have prepared notes!’. Actively reflect on how something might be interpreted differently.
* Do not interrupt a child when they are speaking – be lenient with time when children are speaking, recognising they often feel nervous and exposed.
1. **LISTEN –** *Children repeatedly tell us after UN meetings that they do not feel that adults take them seriously. Children want to feel listened to and suggest for adults to make an extra effort to actively listen to children and take into account their views equally.*
* Make an extra effort to pay attention when children are talking (such as not having a separate conversation or being on your phone) to help ensure they feel respected and listened to.
* Remember that children are equal rights holders and should be taken seriously as experts in their own right.
* Do not tell a child their opinion or answer is wrong. It is possible to highlight alternative viewpoints or approaches but be careful in the way you frame your reply.
1. **BE MINDFUL OF THEIR SAFEETY –** *Children have told us that they often feel at risk of reprisals when acting as a human rights defender. This can include bullying online and offline, feeling excluded from others and being targeted when they return home. Adults can help by being aware of when a child may need help.*
* The priority is to ensure all child participants are free from any harm from the moment they leave their home until their return. This includes any risk of, or potential for, physical or mental harm of a child, such as physical violence, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, emotional or verbal abuse, discourteous behaviour, threats or intimidation.
* If you are concerned about the immediate safety of a child, call the Samoan police at 911. If a child expresses a concern to you, or if you observe a situation or behaviour of concern, please contact Chanmi KIM at OHCHR (ckim@ohchr.org) or Emma Grindulis at Child Rights Connect (grindulis@childrightsconnect.org).
* Remember that the child participants can freely choose to stop participating / remove themselves from any discussion or role they may have at any time, and no pressure should be given otherwise.