

Thank you, Madam Chair, for this opportunity to address the delegates in this room. Dear delegates - As was emphasized at the opening this morning, we need to move from words to actions. There is a lot of regulation in place, but there is a huge gap between regulation and implementation. Therefore, we, the major group for Children and Youth look forward to hearing countries bring forward concrete solutions to these pressing problems.

So far only the Belgian delegation has been brave enough to bring up the issue of child labor in mining. We need to wake up to the reality that today, there are 1 million children working in mines, and the number is growing. Our children should be in schools, not mines. Children should come home with book bags, not mining kits. Education for children is the second Millennium Development Goal, and it is a fundamental right. Children need to develop themselves and thereby develop their communities.

We need to closely look at the reasons for parents sending their children into mines, and then think of solutions from there. The causes of child labor are many-fold, complex and interrelated: it does not exist in a vacuum, so we believe solutions must be sought in the larger context. The economic situation of parents should be improved, so they do not have to send their children to the mine. One crucial way to strengthen parents' positions in mining communities is diversification of those economies. Too often, mining communities are vulnerable to shock, and closure of the mine brings economic disaster. Governments can help by providing infrastructure projects to provide alternative employment. Also, governments can design positive social incentives, for example by providing reward funds for children attending school.

Child labor occurs in the small-scale and artisanal mining industry. The problems in the mining sector are not limited to this sector though. Despite recent initiatives, communities often do not benefit sufficiently from the presence of large-scale mining operations, and often suffer. Local people are generally excluded from jobs in the large-scale mining sector. This is unacceptable: the primary responsibility lies with the mining companies to seek out the local population for jobs in the mining industry, including providing training if necessary. Also, companies need to substantially invest in local procurement: mining operations need to come out of economic isolation and bring sustainable development to local communities and countries. Mining codes should make such commitments mandatory.

The international community has a crucial role to create partnerships for sustainable development, between countries as well as companies. Many countries lack the capacity to properly monitor and enforce existing legislation, while companies need to further increase their expertise on sustainable development. We thank the Australian delegation for their comments on this matter.

In conclusion, we would like to hear concrete answers to important questions from the delegates present. In this regard, we commend the Belgian delegation for their inspiring example. Our immediate question to you is: what action will your country take to eradicate child labor in mining before 2015? Child labor is an expansive and multi-dimensional problem, so we look forward to hearing many different solutions.