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## **PRESS RELEASE**

Universal Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols Needed to Protect Children Worldwide

New York, 19 September 2013 - The Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, and the Special Representative on Violence Against Children, Marta Santos Pais, called today for the universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three Optional Protocols.

“Millions of children around the globe suffer daily from violence, exploitation and abuse. Ignored by statistics and neglected by policy action they are silent victims, excluded from the public debate,” said Marta Santos Pais. “They need the additional protection that the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols can give them,” added Leila Zerrougui.

The 2013 Treaty Event of the United Nations is placing a special emphasis on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. The event, held on the 24, 25, 26, 30 September and 1 October, is an opportunity for Member States to sign or ratify these important treaties.

The Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 for use in armed conflict and asks States to demobilize anyone under 18 involved in hostilities and to provide recovery and reintegration services.

Since its entry into force in 2002, this protocol has been ratified by 152 countries. Twenty States have signed but not ratified it and 23 have neither signed nor ratified the Optional Protocol.

“Every new commitment brings us closer to a world where all States agree that children belong far from the battlefield,” said Leila Zerrougui. “The goal is within reach and many countries have taken the additional step to criminalize the use of children under 18 in conflict in their national legislation.”

The Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography calls for the criminalization of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and protects children below 18 from these serious violations. This Protocol is closer to universal ratification as 164 States have ratified it, and less than 30 are yet to join.

The third Optional Protocol allows children to bring complaints to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on the violation of their rights. Adopted in December 2011, it has been ratified by 6 countries and signed by 37.

“Ratification and implementation of the Protocols lay the foundation for children’s protection from violence, abuse and exploitation. Children are key actors in this process. To inform them about their rights and prevent their victimization, I am launching today a child-friendly version of the Third Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure.” added Ms. Santos Pais.

The child-friendly version was developed in consultation with children in different regions of the world and is an advocacy tool to help young people raise awareness and promote the safeguard of the rights of the child.

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