

Thursday 22 October, 2015

**Statement by Ireland**

Mr. Chair,

Ireland aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the EU and we would like to extend our appreciation to the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Professor Heiner Bielefeldt, for his report *on the rights of the child and his or her parents in the area of freedom of religion or belief*.

Ireland welcomes the report's emphasis that children are individual right holders to the right to freedom of religion or belief and we value the detailed outline of the interrelatedness of the rights of the child to freedom of religion or belief and parental rights. We understand that this a complex area and we agree that the best interests of the child should be at the centre of the discussion.

In particular we share the concern for freedom of religion or belief for people belonging to minorities, converts, dissidents, critics, atheists or agnostics, members of non-recognised groups and others. The risk and gravity of violations of freedom of religion or belief for children in these circumstances is even greater due to the particular needs, interests, vulnerabilities and capabilities of the child.

Ireland appreciates the Special Rapporteur's call upon States to pay more attention to violations of the rights of the child and his or her parents in the area of freedom of religion or belief, and we recognise the practical benefits in promoting the exchange of best practices in order to promote awareness of the

various components of freedom of religion or belief. In this regard we would like to ask the Special Rapporteur ways in which States and religious communities can ensure freedom of religion or belief for children and parents that are members of minority religions and non-recognised groups, particularly in community and educational settings.

Thank you