Opening remarks:

My name is Deeqo Godax, Deputy Director, Institute of Modern Languages at SIMAD University in Mogadishu, Somalia.

I'm pleased to take part in this round table.

The university president, Mr. Dahir Hasan Arab couldn't be here today. He sends his sincere apologies as he had urgent family matters to attend to.

On behalf of SIMAD, we thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important topic of the rights of a child.

With that said, the position of SIMAD is to empower children by advocating for services that would give children the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The enrollment of the university has surpassed expectations. Somali youth are pursuing post secondary education at an alarming rate. They are eager to learn.

We at SIMAD are doing our part when it comes to the rights of the child by assuring that stakeholders understand the needs on the ground. At the same time, we are raising awareness in areas that really matter to Somali families. More specifically, we aim to focus on ways to strength the health and education sectors in Somalia.

Somalia is in the state of recovery. Being stateless for over 20 years has its challenges. That said, we want our children to grow up and cared for. We want to equip children with tools for tomorrow's challenges.

Our goal is to ensure children are given every opportunity and receive good quality of life. Our aim is to make sure we educate competent teachers who can make a difference in children's lives.

SIMAD University provides scholarships to students. We also are a step in the right direction by investing in our staff. We encourage our stuff to pursue post secondary education abroad. By investing in its staff, SIMAD produced competent work force, many who had opportunities to study abroad. Some of them earned Master and PHDs from reputable universities around the world.

Human investment is crucial to Somali's future.

Somali children need to know that education is a right not a privilege.

The job of protecting and enforcing children rights is not the sole responsibility of the government. Parents, educators, as well as private and public sector have a collective responsibility in not just recognizing the rights of the child but in enforcing it.
We want more than ceremonies and empty promises. We need to find solution that will tackle the infant mortality rates, increasing school enrollment at the primary level and providing sufficient protection for children against abuses.

Let us focus on some of the positives, namely school enrollment.

The sample I have collected in some of the districts in Mogadishu look promising. Primary and secondary enrollment is growing steadily. More children have access to basic services, including education but we have a long way to go. Somali families face challenges of maintaining basic services due to high fertility rate. Infant mortality rate is alarming as it concerns children under five years. (One in seven Somali children are dying before their fifth birthday – Source: Non-government organizations working in Somalia)

Recent studies show that children under 18 years of age make up nearly half of the population. This is why the all important subject of children’s rights in areas of health, education and child protection need to be closely examined.

Somali families are faced with the burden of providing basic services such as shelter, food, education to their children. Basic living expenses, health care and education cost money. Parents cannot afford to pay school fees, coupled with low literacy rate among rural communities. This makes it difficult to invest in the children’s education.

One direct result from the low primary rate enrollment in Somalia is due to the fact that less than 20% of school children start school at age 6. Majority of the children start their formal education at a later age due to many of the circumstances discussed earlier.

More boys than girls have access to education in Somalia. We are working increasing enrollment rates for girls at the primary level. One way of ensuring this is by increasing the number of quality teachers at the primary level. Less than 15% of primary teachers are females. This needs to change.

We need to raise awareness and provide solutions to increasing access to education for girls in Somalia. We need to increase the role of women as teachers at the primary level. SIMAD is working to invest in the education of children but more specifically in ensuring more girls have access to education. We are looking for partners in raising those needs at the local, region and international level.

Let’s build the leaders of tomorrow while working to strengthen child protection laws and providing quality education for all children.

Thank you.

Deeqo Godax
SIMAD University