



**Speech by Heinz Hilgers,
President of the Deutscher Kinderschutzbund,
to mark World Children's Day
on 17 September 2015 in Dresden, Germany**

Check against delivery

Children,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to begin by recalling the story of four-year-old Niklas. In mid-August, Niklas gatecrashed a video interview with the rapper Fard, who was talking about the refugee debate for the website hiphop.de. Fard, who is from Iran and came to Germany with his parents when he was a young child, notices Niklas walking past and – in the middle of the interview – spontaneously calls him over in front of the rolling camera. After the standard greeting (a high five), he starts asking Niklas questions. He wants to know how he's doing, if he's in kindergarten yet and if he's enjoying it. When Fard asks him, "Are there any foreigners there?" Niklas is a bit puzzled by the question and immediately replies, "No, just children!" The answer is as simple as it is brilliant. Niklas hit the nail squarely on the head: above all else, they are children. They come to us with their wishes, dreams, hopes and – just like all children – with their talents.

Globally, one in two refugees is a child. In Germany, it is one in three. Now let me ask you in all seriousness: does that come across in the discussions we hear among policymakers and in the media in this country? Children whose rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child were taken from them in their homeland, or never given to them in the first place? It is now our responsibility to make these rights a reality, to support these children at this difficult time in their lives, and to give them the help they need. This includes supporting their families, and indeed every adult refugee who comes to our country – not least because we have to be good role models for these children.

We want to help you lead independent lives here. Education and the best possible healthcare are the keys to an independent future. However, to integrate successfully, people also need language courses, assistance in everyday life, and quick inclusion in their new communities.



As the Deutscher Kinderschutzbund (German child protection association), we are therefore calling on the German government to put in place uniform standards for the allocation of refugees, for their accommodation, care and education, and for their social, academic and professional development. We believe that the government should bear the costs of this in full. The quality of the organisation of refugee support must not depend on the financial resources available in Germany's various municipalities, local authorities and states. Our society is responsible for creating the conditions that will allow families to care for their children.

With that in mind, we are campaigning for setting up, in as many places in Germany as possible, competence centres that specialise in addressing the needs of unaccompanied refugee minors. Experts in those centres will have to be prepared for handling traumas that the children might have suffered in civil wars, as a result of persecution, or during their escape from their countries. The staff should also be capable of better steering the integration of these young refugees into our country, our education system and our world of work.

We must also stand up for children who, as part of the free movement of workers, come to us from countries in the European Union such as Romania and Bulgaria. We must not allow their lives in our society to be shaped by marginalisation, unsuitable housing and unregulated health insurance. They, too, have a right to healthcare and education under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

With the aim of strengthening Germany's *Willkommenskultur*, our culture of welcome, the Deutscher Kinderschutzbund is marking this year's World Children's Day by holding welcome festivals for child refugees and their families. We are delighted that you took up our invitation, and we extend our warmest welcome to you all.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the event organisers – our Dresden branch and St. Benno grammar school – and to all the donors for their great willingness to participate in the school materials campaign.

And I hope that the people of Germany behave towards all of you in a way that mirrors the wonderful example set for us by four-year-old Niklas.