



**Statement by**

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**EXPERT CONSULTATION ON PREVENTION OF AND RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST YOUNG CHILDREN**

LIMA, PERU, 27-28 AUGUST 2012

Dear friends,

I warmly welcome you to this seventh expert consultation on violence against children, here in the beautiful city of Lima where I conducted my first mission as a Special Representative, in September 2009. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Peru for hosting this important meeting. The Government's support is a strong indicator of its commitment to protect children from all forms of violence, in particular young children.

The organization of this expert consultation in Latin America has a very special relevance, as it builds upon the adoption, in 2011, of the Declaration of Asuncion and a Regional Roadmap for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children; and subsequently, the adoption of the Declaration of Santo Domingo and more recently the Kingston Declaration which provide guidance for regional organizations such MERCOSUR's Permanent Commission Niñ@Sur, the Central America Integration System (SICA) and CARICOM in their initiatives to promote regional and national action for preventing and responding to violence against children in all Member and Associated States.

I would also like to acknowledge the strong technical and financial support for this meeting provided by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, a stalwart supporter of my mandate and a leading actor for the protection of children in early childhood. Likewise, the Global Movement for Children in Latin America and the Caribbean has provided crucial support to this meeting. The Movement is a strategic ally of my mandate and has supported strategic activities in the past three years; its continued support open decisive opportunities for consolidating children's protection in this wide continent. Many thanks are also due to UNICEF, both for its support to this meeting and in general for the unique partnership and the steady backing it has given to my mandate over the last years.

I also would like to acknowledge the presence here of Ms. Maria Herczog representing the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Committee has been a great supporter of my work, and has made important contributions to previous expert consultations. The Committee's normative and conceptual work – in particular through its General Comments no. 7 on early childhood and no. 8 and 13 on the protection from corporal punishment and the right to freedom from all forms of violence – will be an important resource for our discussions.

I also would like to offer a very special and warm welcome to the children and adolescents who join us in this Expert Consultation. Indeed, this is the first time that children directly participate in an expert consultation – an important step forward and a clear recognition of the role of children as experts and as agents of change. Their contribution is well captured by the contribution of one adolescent in Colombia, who participated in one of our consultations: “I believe it is important to participate in consultations because there is on the one hand the perception of the State on child protection and on the other, is the perception of civil society, consisting of children, adolescents and adults. But in addition, it is key to share our views about what happens with the protection of children, adolescents and youth, especially in our local community.” I can think of no better way to make clear that if we listen to children, our responses to violence will be more effective and sustainable.

Dear friends,

The organization of expert consultations has become a strategic dimension in my efforts to accelerate progress towards the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children, everywhere, and at all times. These consultations serve as platforms to build knowledge, bring together experts and activists from different disciplines and sectors, and devote particular attention to issues of special interest and concern. They are not one-off events; they are followed by thematic studies and follow-up implementation efforts by the participants and other interested parties to influence positive change and consolidate children's protection from violence. Importantly, expert consultations are also a way to table particular issues at high political levels, through my reports to the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council and their consolidation in the context of regional meetings and political dialogue at the national level.

Dear friends,

Violence against very young children has been a priority concern since the agenda on violence against children first gained traction within the United Nations system with the development of the UN Study on Violence against Children; the Study reported a chilling fact: eighty percent of children who die from violence are under six years old. Research on this topic has continued to provide evidence on this dramatic phenomenon. A recent article in the Lancet suggests that 300 million children under five years old are exposed to societal or community violence. Other evidence tells us of the high levels of violence against young children in institutions and the risks faced by the most vulnerable children, such including children who are indigenous and children with disabilities. These are frightening and worrisome facts and figures, which underline the urgency of our mission to promote better and more effective action to prevent neglect, injury and abuse and to protect young children from all forms of violence.

But that is not the whole story: evidence from different sources indicates that exposure to violence at a young age has long-term, often permanent, mental and physiological consequences, robbing the child of his or her full potential to become an active, confident and productive member of society. Exposure to violence is of course also a serious infringement of many children's rights, including the right to freedom from violence, safeguarded by the

Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its General Comment on Article 19 of the Convention, also recognized the special vulnerability of young children, underlining that "Babies and young children are at higher risk due to the immaturity of their developing brain and their complete dependency on adults." In the last three years, as Special Representative on Violence against Children, I have been stressing the same fact, and have made the case for the adoption of special measures to prevent violence in family settings and child care institutions, and for solid support to enable young children's access to basic social services of quality, and to help parents and caregivers secure a protective environment and promote positive discipline as an alternative to corporal punishment and abuse.

Violence against children in early childhood, including by exposing very young children to violence between parents or in the community, are key factors in the intergenerational transmission of violence. Children who have experienced violence in their early years, are more likely to use violence when they grow-up against their partners and against their own children. The adage that prevention is better than cure may be old, but it is no less true. If we succeed in breaking this vicious cycle now, we can actually reduce and eliminate violence for future generations. As the UN Study stresses, appropriate and early prevention of violence against children, "promises to address a host of longer-term problems that impose a substantial social and economic burden on the nations of the world."

Positive parenting initiatives and early childhood interventions hold particular promise in establishing patterns of non-violence from an early age, and likewise schools have an enormous potential to disseminate positive values, also in the community. Sadly, despite these benefits from both a human, social and an economic point of view, around the world investment in prevention tends to remain particularly weak.

That is why our meeting this week is so important. Intervening early in children's life to prevent and combat violence will actually pay off a large dividend, bringing down overall levels of tension and conflict, reducing intimate partner violence, violence against women and children, and violence in society, and improving perspectives for social and economic development. This is why it is so critical to have with us governmental officials and policy makers who can share

with us positive experiences and lessons from their national work and translate into action the outcomes from our meeting.

Dear friends,

As you know, I have been giving committed to place priority attention to three basic recommendations set forth by the UN Study on Violence against Children, priorities that have also been identified by governments everywhere as crucial areas where progress needs to be achieved. When addressing violence against young children these priority areas are urgent and should be crucial components of our agenda:

- **Putting in place a comprehensive, well-coordinated and well-resourced national agenda on violence against children** – Starting with very young children help overcome the cycle of violence and shape integrated policies to address child poverty and social exclusion to support good parenting and provide for the needed services for families, particularly those in greater need.
- **Introducing an explicit legal prohibition of all forms of violence in all settings, supported by child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaint mechanisms** can convey a clear message for society and families, going beyond the simple prohibition of physical, emotional violence, neglect and child abuse, and providing assistance to parents in the fulfillment of their responsibilities and the provision of accessible state services and mechanisms to prevent and address incidents of violence.
- **Consolidating violence-related data and research** – will provide visibility to hidden forms of violence, will help understand risk factors of vulnerability, while strengthening information about the magnitude and incidence of violence to guide policies and interventions, to monitor progress and to better evaluate the effectiveness of our actions and identify what works in violence prevention.

A year ago, I launched a global survey to assess progress towards the implementation of the recommendations of the UN Study, including the priority recommendations I just mentioned.

While the findings of the survey will be released later this year, I take this opportunity to share with you some important findings, based on responses received from more than 100 countries.

The analysis conducted reveals an evolving picture – a picture where violence against children is gaining visibility in the national agenda, with increasing legislative action, policy interventions, and information campaigns to safeguard children’s freedom from violence; and also with some promising initiatives to capture the prevalence of this phenomenon.

But many challenges persist:

- **There are insufficient efforts to develop a cohesive and well-resourced national strategy on violence against children** – less than 20 percent of national replies indicate that they have a comprehensive agenda to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children;
- **Policy interventions are largely uncoordinated** – only two-thirds of the responses acknowledge a lead coordinating governmental institution in place to oversee actions on violence against children, at times lacking the power and influence to lead policy design and implementation
- **Most legislative responses remain dispersed, fragmented and ill-enforced** – for instance, only about 30 countries have a full legal ban in place, and only a handful have adopted legislative measures to support good parenting; more than three-quarters of respondents acknowledged that violence in the family and home environment is only partially - and yet, this is the setting where the risk of violence remains higher
- **Overall we see insufficient investment in family support, in the capacity building of professionals, and in safe and child-sensitive mechanisms to prevent and address incidents of violence;** and moreover,
- **There is not enough data and research to break the invisibility of violence and inform strategic evidence-based decision making to address risk factors and support children in vulnerable situations** – for example, not one of the countries surveyed reported having a comprehensive and disaggregated data collection system on violence against children that would allow for crucial interventions. At the same time, there appears to

be a correlation between countries with high numbers of vulnerable children and low data collection rates.

Clearly, all countries need to step up efforts. The findings underline the urgency of our task to sketch a way forward and put in place an implementation process that can help governments and other stakeholders in better preventing and eliminating violence, in particular violence against very young children.

Dear friends,

Our meeting has clear objectives. Our overall aim is to influence the global agenda on violence against children by making visible the phenomenon of violence against children in early childhood and its impact on the cycle of violence later in life, as well as in society and in the development of nations.

These coming days, I hope that we will

- map out progress and persisting challenges and reflect on key findings from initiatives developed by strategic partners,
- consider ways of promoting the use of knowledge on violence in early childhood and violence prevention in supporting political decision-making and action,
- and explore options for awareness-raising and communication strategies for the prevention of violence in early childhood.

We know that there is much experience to learn from, and much on which we can build in terms of partnerships and research networks. We must make sure that our recommendations reflect these achievements and assets.

This week we have a strategic opportunity to make a difference. I thank you all, and look forward to our discussions this week.

Thank you.

