



# The Bridgetown Declaration and Agenda for Action to Combat Child Sexual Abuse in the Caribbean

Adopted at:  
*Conference on Combatting Sexual Violence Against Children in the Caribbean*  
held in Bridgetown, Barbados

20-21 November 2012.

## Declaration

**We**, the participants at the Bridgetown Conference on Combating Sexual Violence Against Children in the Caribbean, representing governments, non-governmental organizations human rights institutions, the private sector, religious institutions and leaders, researchers and academics, law enforcement, and the legal community, gathered in Bridgetown Barbados 20-21 November 2012 to review progress made since the UN Study on Violence Against Children (UNSVAC) 2006 to identify lessons learnt and key challenges hereby commit ourselves to the rigorous implementation of the goals and targets contained in this **Declaration and Agenda for Action** to combat sexual abuse of girls and of boys in the Caribbean and ensure those who have fallen victim to sexual abuse receive the highest quality, and fullest possible support and care, in a timely manner, in accordance with the CRC and its Optional Protocols,

Recognizing that the sexual abuse of girls and of boys is an individual, family, community, national, regional and global problem we declare that decisive coordinated action is required at all levels to end this scourge on our societies,

**We** further recognize that all children deserve to be fully protected from any and all forms of violence including sexual abuse as this represents a violation of their rights,

We affirm that there can be no excuse and no justification for the sexual abuse of girls and boys. We recognize that many factors including poverty, discrimination, gender biases, illicit use of new technologies and social media, adult responsibility, irresponsibility, harmful cultural and traditional practices, ignorance of the impact of sexual abuse on the victim, and gender power differentials all play a part in driving this phenomenon by increasing children's, especially girls', vulnerability to sexual abuse,

**We** further affirm that the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), to which all CARICOM Member States and associate members are signatories, as well as other relevant human rights instruments together constitute the standard for protecting children from violence and sexual abuse. The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that in undertaking any action the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration and further that the views of children should be valued and taken into consideration in the formulation and implementation of policies and actions on their behalf,

We further acknowledge and are concerned that efforts to prevent and stop the sexual abuse of children are undermined by a range of factors including deficiencies in the law, lax enforcement of the law, corruption and collusion, theological interpretations, gender norms and power relations, political interference, a culture of secrecy and silence, inadequate public education and sensitization, lack of political will, poor coordination among child protection agencies, and a lack of multi-sectoral and multidisciplinary approaches to identifying and preventing the sexual abuse of children,

We share the grave concern of the Twenty-Third Meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD XX111) about the alarming prevalence of sexual abuse of children in the Caribbean Region, and welcome the promises and commitments made by that COHSOD to stop this harmful phenomenon,

We likewise endorse the view expressed in the *Declaration of The Young Persons of the Caribbean*, in Kingston Jamaica on 15 May 2012, that violence against children is a norm or tradition in the region that is being passed on to generations, and therefore drastic preventive actions need to be adopted,

Taking into account the need to have a comprehensive strategy for preventing and stopping the sexual abuse of the girl child and the boy child, we reaffirm that stopping this gross violation of Human Rights requires a shared responsibility and sustained commitment by all of us. Therefore, we, the participants of this Bridgetown Conference hereby agree to and recommend the following Agenda for Action as a means of accelerating and intensifying efforts against the sexual abuse of both girls and boys in the Caribbean and guaranteeing that the mandatory reporting and follow-up of child sexual abuse by all professionals working with children is fully realised in all our countries by the year 2015.

### **Agenda for Action Against the Sexual Abuse of Children**

*We call upon Caribbean Governments with the help of other stakeholders including civil society (such as non-governmental organizations, community based organizations & faith based organizations), the private sector, children and young people and international organizations to:*

1. Ratify and implement all key international child protection instruments, including the CRC Optional Protocols (and the CEDAW Protocols), relating to all forms of violence against children;
2. Revise and harmonize national legislations with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other relevant international child protection instruments, taking into account the General Comments and the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and CEDAW Committee;
3. Vigorously pursue the implementation and enforcement of child-friendly policies and laws aimed at preventing the sexual abuse of children and bringing to justice the perpetrators while ensuring that investigations and criminal and other legal proceedings are treated as urgent priorities;

4. Undertake initiatives which promote a cultures of zero tolerance for sexual violence against girls and boys aimed at national and regional decision makers on the range of issues related to the sexual abuse of children;
5. Undertake public awareness-raising and social mobilisation initiatives aimed specifically at all groups within society: boys, girls, men and women, including persons with disabilities, opinion leaders, families, communities, on the various issues related to the sexual abuse of children;
6. Develop, in collaboration with parents and other relevant stakeholders, specially-designed participatory sexual education programmes aimed at enabling boys and girls to better protect and defend themselves against sexual abuse;
7. Develop programmes to educate and support parents to carry out their roles and responsibilities in relation to the protection of their children.
8. Utilize resources to significantly strengthen national and regional frameworks, national statistical offices, mechanisms and procedures for the collection, analysis and dissemination of both qualitative and quantitative data on the sexual abuse of children;
9. Provide adequate human, financial and technical resources to develop and implement a national programme of action against the sexual abuse of children;
10. Enhance inter-ministerial coordination and mechanisms within the context of a national programme of action against the sexual abuse of children in order to better respond to the multi-dimensional and complex nature of preventing and responding to child sexual abuse;
11. Initiate and/or strengthen research aimed at understanding the gendered social and cultural context of child sexual abuse in the Caribbean;
12. Encourage the development of national and regional civil society networks aimed at combating the problem of child sexual abuse;
13. Encourage governments to develop mechanisms to ensure safety and confidentiality of those disclosing and/or reporting cases of child sexual abuse;
14. Encourage governments to strengthen national laws and policies and promote standards to ensure ethical reporting of cases of child sexual abuse;
15. Establish policies, mechanisms and programmes for victims of child sexual abuse and their families to be able to access free of charge and in a timely manner, high quality social, medical, and psychological services to facilitate the victim's treatment and reintegration into the family, school and community;
16. Encourage the inclusion of child sexual abuse on the agenda of Ministries of Health, Education, and Justice;

17. Create a holistic framework and approach to combating child sexual abuse on the internet which encourages governments to share information on child sexual abuse using the internet, and by facilitating cross-border investigations and cooperation on all aspects of preventing the sexual abuse of children and the prosecution of perpetrators;
18. Develop and implement awareness raising strategies of protection measures and the rights of children among persons in such areas as education, health, social protection, and religion, and in the fields of judicial and law enforcement, sports, culture and leisure, who come into contact with children on a regular basis;
19. Implement the XX111 COHSOD call for the creation of safe places in which victims and others affected are free to report and speak out against the sexual abuse of children without fear of recrimination;
20. Consolidate community, national and regional data bases and research on all forms of violence against children for the purpose of supporting advocacy initiatives and informing policy decisions and resource mobilization to prevent violence against children, and to support the rights of children as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
21. Establish effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and strategies, with specific indicators for measuring performance and progress, and for the sharing of best practices and lessons learned, in order to better prevent the sexual abuse of children;
22. Adopt measures, such as interagency protocols, to ensure that there is effective coordination and cooperation at the community, national and regional levels among the various child protection entities with key responsibilities for combating sexual violence against children, and for managing the treatment and safe reintegration of victims of sexual violence;
23. Stipulate that every country establish a national hotline/help line utilizing telephone and internet technologies to facilitate confidential reporting of cases of child sexual abuse, and to provide advice to callers, including victims of sexual violence;
24. In keeping with their evolving capacity, ensure and encourage the active participation of children, in the formulation and implementation of gender sensitive policies, programmes and activities aimed at preventing the sexual abuse of children;
25. Encourage the media to become active partners in the formulation and implementation of gender sensitive policies, programmes and activities aimed at preventing the sexual abuse of children.

26. Establish support services for survivors and aid rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders with a view to breaking the cycle of violence;
27. Encourage the private sector to assist with the provision of funding and other forms of support for civil society (including non-governmental organizations, community based organizations, and faith-based organisations) programmes and activities aimed at combating sexual and other forms of violence against children;
28. Institute the required national legislation and policies specifying the minimum quality standards for the short and long term treatment of victims of sexual violence, and ensure that these are standardized and harmonized at the regional level.

We, the participants, of this Conference on Combatting Sexual Violence Against Children in the Caribbean, Bridgetown, Barbados, 20-21 November 2012 respectfully request the Secretary General of CARICOM, Ambassador Irwin LaRocque, to present the results of this forum to the CARICOM Heads of Government for consideration and follow-up action.

**Bridgetown, Barbados  
21 November 2012**