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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development

Summary of the full-day meeting on the rights of the child

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 13/20 of 26 March 2010 on the rights of the child, in which the Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a summary of the full-day meeting on the rights of the child, as a follow-up to paragraph 7 of Council resolution 7/29 of 28 March 2008. The report contains a summary of the discussions held on 10 March 2010 during the annual full day of discussion on the fight against sexual violence against children.

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I. Background

1. In its resolution 7/29 on the rights of the child adopted on 28 March 2008, the Human Rights Council decided to dedicate, at a minimum, an annual full-day meeting to discuss different specific themes on the rights of the child, including the identification of challenges in the realization of the rights of the child. In its resolution 10/14 on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocols thereto, adopted on 26 March 2009, the Council decided to focus its next resolution and annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child on the fight against sexual violence against children.

2. The annual full-day meeting on the fight against sexual violence against children took place on 10 March 2010, and was aimed at raising awareness about sexual violence against children, reaffirming existing standards and commitments, highlighting good practices and lessons learnt from work over the years, as well as identifying key challenges and anticipating future work. The full-day meeting consisted of two panels: the morning panel focused on manifestations of sexual violence against boys and girls while the afternoon panel was devoted to discussing protection of boys and girls from sexual violence: prevention and response. More than 60 States; 5 non-governmental organizations on behalf of other organizations dealing with rights of the child; the European Union; the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) and UNICEF participated in the interactive dialogue following the morning and afternoon presentations.

II. Manifestations of sexual violence against boys and girls

A. Introductory remarks and statements by panellists

3. The morning panel was moderated by Alex Van Meeuwen, President of the Human Rights Council. The Director of the Human Rights Council and Special Procedures Division of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Bacre Waly Ndiaye, made introductory remarks, followed by presentations by: Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children; Tim Ekesa, Director of the Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children; Manfred Nowak, Special Rapporteur on question of torture; Lena Karlsson, Director of the Child Protection Initiative, Save the Children; and Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

4. In his introductory remarks, Mr. Ndiaye said that of all forms of violence against children, sexual violence was unquestionably one of the most repugnant. Children were physically hurt and mentally scarred in the most terrible way, with lifelong consequences. The panel would address the root causes of sexual violence in the five settings in which childhood was spent, namely home, schools, care and justice systems, workplaces and the community, and would additionally focus on sexual violence against children in conflict situations, emergencies and disasters. He highlighted some recent progress regarding children in conflict situations including Security Council resolution 1882 (2009), which reiterated that sexual violence against children during conflict would no longer be tolerated, and requested the Secretary-General to list, in his annual report to the Security Council, parties to armed conflict that engage in patterns of rape and other sexual violence against children in armed conflict, as well as the establishment of the mandate of Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence against Women in Armed Conflict recently entrusted to Margot Wallström. He also described the process leading to the United Nations study on violence against children and its recommendations and

welcomed the participation of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children.

5. Mr. Ndiaye referred to the recent commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, at which the persisting challenges to its full implementation were noted, including in ensuring the dignity of the child; in providing the child with full possibilities for development; and in facilitating dialogue between adults and children. He also recalled that child participants to the event focused also on issues affecting the dignity of children, and in particular sexual exploitation and abuse. They issued a number of recommendations which also included a request for an integrated approach to prevention of and protection from abuse and sexual and economic exploitation of girls and boys, based on the rights of the child. In May 2010 we would celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on, respectively, the involvement of children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It would be ideal to reach universal ratification of both Optional Protocols by 2012, the tenth anniversary of their entry into force.

6. Mr. Ndiaye added that an Open-ended Working Group of the Human Rights Council was now working on the possibility of elaborating an Optional Protocol to the Convention that would introduce a communications procedure for the rights the child. This mechanism could further strengthen the protection of children's rights, including with regard to sexual violence. He concluded his remarks by stating that the discussion should contribute to developing a more holistic understanding of the various manifestations of this under-recognized problem, and of effective modalities of addressing it with a child rights-based approach.

7. The Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children, Ms. Santos Pais, focused her presentation on sexual violence against children in the family and the community. She said the family was the natural environment for the development and well-being of the child. For many children, however, the daily reality was one of neglect and trauma as they witnessed or endured domestic violence and ill treatment and abuse, including sexual violence, very often behind a curtain of silence and social indifference. Ms. Santos Pais said that girls appeared to be at greater risk of sexual violence and forced and early marriage, which in itself is a form of sexual violence. Up to one third of adolescent girls report their first sexual experience as being forced. Although less frequently acknowledged, sexual violence against boys was also a significant problem, including within the home. She emphasized that sexual violence has a dramatic and lasting impact on children's physical and emotional health, on their development and education, and is also linked to other forms of violence, including trafficking. Sexual violence also negatively affects the social well-being of victims, as they are often blamed, coerced to keep silent, and stigmatized and marginalized by their families and communities.

8. The Special Representative underlined that sexual violence was a particularly difficult topic to survey as a result of its sensitive nature. Available data was scanty and fragmented, national studies were scarce, and reporting remained weak and difficult. In the case of sexual violence within the home, the pressure to conceal it was particularly strong, with shame, secrecy and denial leading to a pervasive culture of silence.

9. She described the experience of a national survey conducted in Swaziland, as a follow-up to the United Nations Study on violence against children. The finding of the survey helped to break the silence around violence and contributed to the development of a national strategy to effectively prevent and address it. This study underscored the importance for each country to develop a strategic agenda to prevent and address sexual violence. Key dimensions of this strategy should include: solid data and research; the identification of underlying causes and groups of children who may be at greater risk;

strong and explicit legislation to combat violence; and accessible, child-sensitive counselling, and complaints and investigation mechanisms to address sexual violence and to provide redress and assistance to victims. In all regions, significant experiences led her to conclude that there is a widely shared commitment to build a strong protective environment for children, an environment where violence and sexual violence had no place.

10. The Director of the Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children, Tim Ekesa, in his presentation on sexual violence in schools, said that although schools should be particularly safe places for children, teachers have been often found to engage in sexual violence against boys and girls, including pressuring children to engage in sexual activities or indecent exposure. The slow pace of implementation of legislation protecting children, slow judicial processes and the often insignificant penalties for perpetrators of sexual violence in schools led to the escalation of such cases, adding that the effects of sexual violence against children included depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

11. Empowering boys and girls in schools and educational facilities through child-led movements and with information on their rights and responsibilities have proven to be valuable mechanisms of defence against sexual violence as they enabled open communication and active participation. The Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children called upon Government ministries responsible for education and children's affairs, child-focused non-governmental organizations, as well as teachers' unions and service commissions to set checks and balances on offenders and to ensure that offenders are subjected to stronger penalties.

12. The Special Rapporteur on the question of torture, Manfred Nowak, highlighted that more than one million children around the world are deprived of their liberty. They are likely to be subjected to abuse not only by police and correctional officers but also by fellow detainees. He highlighted that children are more vulnerable to abuse if they are detained in the same facilities or particularly the same cells with adults; if girls are supervised by male staff; if they are detained in inhuman and degrading conditions of detention, including severe overcrowding; and if there is no or insufficient adequately trained staff in institutions and other detention facilities. He added that, frequently, sexual abuses go unreported due to fear or shame. Moreover, children often faced difficulties in accessing legal aid and services, including medical and forensic facilities, to secure evidence and substantiate their claims, depriving them of the possibility of accessing the justice system.

13. The Special Rapporteur warned that there was not always a distinction between placing children in need of protection and those facing judicial procedures. As a result, detention facilities may hold children in pretrial detention, victims of child trafficking or sexual exploitation, abandoned or homeless children, as well as children with mental disabilities. To prevent sexual and other types of violence against children, he recommended that States should elaborate a clear policy stating that sexual violence against detainees would not be tolerated; ensure that institutionalized care would only be used as a last resort; ensure that all children should be removed from adult detention facilities; and establish independent and effective complaints, monitoring and investigation mechanisms.

14. The representative of Save the Children, Ms. Karlsson, spoke of the particular vulnerability of the millions of children who are "on the move". Yet, despite the large number of children involved, their needs and voices were largely absent in the discussions and debates on both child protection and human migration. These children, especially those moving alone, were highly vulnerable to exploitation, coercion, deception and violence, including sexual violence. However, as a result of their social status and discrimination, girls and boys face barriers when they tried to report violence. Children whose status is irregular because of migration face barriers in accessing education and healthcare services.

Many children were even criminalized for the sexual violence they had experienced, in addition to their irregular migration status.

15. She emphasized that children who moved tended to be categorized and labelled as trafficked, kidnapped, unaccompanied, separated, displaced, asylum-seeking, refugees, nomadic children or independent migrants. There is an absence of holistic and rights-based child protection mechanisms accessible to all children on the move irrespective of their status at the country of origin, during movement and at destination. She recommended that policy makers needed to, among other things, gain a better understanding of children's movements, listen to the voice of children, implement fully the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and strengthen legislation and policies to eliminate all forms of sexual violence. She also added that there is a need to understand the perpetrators' behaviour and to promote social changes in attitudes and behaviours which condone and normalize sexual violence against girls and boys.

16. Finally, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Coomaraswamy, spoke about sexual violence against children in conflict situations. She said that sexual violence against children was one of the six grave violations that were committed against children during times of war. She mentioned that perpetrators use rape as a tactic or instrument of war, in order to terrorize target populations and to displace and humiliate them. Sexual violence may also take place because of the symbolic value attached to that violence, which was particularly true in ethnic and tribal wars, or because war often created a climate of impunity. However, if leaders have low tolerance for sexual violence, this can be in fact curtailed.

17. The Special Representative emphasized that, in fighting sexual violence in war time, the international community must not only address the issue of accountability but also the need to assist victims to recover from such violence, and reintegrate them into society. Services for survivors should include legal, medical and psychosocial assistance. That should be an important part of emergency aid in situations of conflict, and expressed hope that the new Special Representative on sexual violence would make this an important part of her mandate. She also recalled that in some situations of armed conflict there are cases of violence against boys, which need to be addressed as well.

B. Plenary discussion

18. In the interactive dialogue following the panellists' presentations, representatives of Uruguay (on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States), the European Union, Colombia, Cuba, Italy, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan (on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference), Sudan (on behalf of the Group of Arab States), Slovenia, Mexico, Jordan, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Belarus, China, Indonesia, New Zealand (on behalf of Canada, Australia and New Zealand), the Russian Federation, Lithuania, Slovakia, Uruguay, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, Tunisia, the United States of America, Kenya, Norway, Syria, Ukraine, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Zambia and Tanzania made statements. The Advisory Council on Human Rights of Morocco also took the floor.

19. Non-governmental organizations delivered four joint statements: one on behalf of the World Organization against Torture (OMCT), Defence for Children International, End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT International), International Federation Terre des Hommes; International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE), Plan International, Child Rights Information Network (CRIN); the African Child Policy Forum, and the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, was dedicated to sexual violence against children in detention. A second statement on behalf of Plan International, Defence for Children International, International Catholic

Child Bureau, SOS Children's Villages; World Vision International, International Federation Terre des Hommes, the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, War Child Holland; Child Helpline International and WAO Afrique (World Association for Orphans and Abandoned Children) focused on sexual abuses in schools. A third statement, delivered by World Vision International on behalf of the International Council of Women, ECPAT International, BICE, Plan International and SOS Children's Villages International, was on sexual violence against children in the aftermath of natural disasters. The fourth statement, delivered by International Save the Children Alliance on behalf of the African Child Policy Forum, Defence for Children International, ECPAT International, BICE, the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Plan International, SOS Children's Villages International, War Child Holland, OMCT and World Vision International, focused on sexual violence against children affected by armed conflict.

20. During the interactive dialogue, all speakers firmly condemned all forms of sexual violence against children. Sexual violence against children is a problem in all regions of the world affecting all areas of children's lives. The fight against this phenomenon must be a matter of urgent priority in the international agenda, as emphasized by most speakers. There were calls on all States to strengthen their efforts and focus on the so-called root causes as well, particularly poverty, and not only the manifestations. A number of speakers expressed concern about the increase in child trafficking and the use of Internet for the sexual exploitation of children. Others emphasized the limited knowledge of the phenomenon of sexual violence, particularly in the context of the family, and the lack of data. It was noted that despite the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights on the Child, the enjoyment of human rights for most children was still a problem and the adoption of relevant legislation was not always enough. Implementation of laws and policies to fight sexual violence and impunity was essential, as well as building awareness of this phenomenon.

21. A number of countries described national initiatives taken to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children. These include introducing legislation and policies against violence and to protect children; increasing sentences, including for sexual tourism and sexual exploitation; providing free telephone services to report cases of abuse; establishing social services close to marginalized areas, centres for children victims of abuse, community services and social reintegration programmes for victims of violence and exploitation. There were numerous calls on exchanging lessons learned in the fight of sexual violence against children.

22. Measures suggested to tackling sexual violence included: improving living standards; promoting international solidarity; including through increased international collaboration on programmes, strategies and research; changing attitudes to the problem and ensuring that both perpetrators and victims are provided with qualified professional help; strengthening mechanisms of prevention and denunciation. Some speakers mentioned that there was also a need for behavioural and social change in communities, and the root causes for the increase in sexual violence should be identified and addressed. Integrating a gender perspective in all efforts and paying attention to the most vulnerable groups, such as the girl child, children in conflict situation, displaced children, children involved in natural disasters, and children with disabilities was also emphasized. A number of countries mentioned the ongoing work on establishing an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights to the Child on a communications procedure.

23. Speakers from UNICEF and non-governmental organizations focused on the importance of participation and of empowerment of children in the fight against sexual violence. In particular, a child representative of Plan International, in a presentation

prepared by children, describing her personal experience as a campaigner in Ghana, said that sexual violence in schools is preventable.

24. Questions included issues such as the role of the Human Rights Council and of the universal periodic review process in the fight against sexual violence; possible synergies in efforts to address sexual violence; the implementation by States of the recommendations issued by the United Nations Study on Violence against Children; effective prevention measures; challenges to overcome violence in the family context and how to take into account the views of children in the various programmes and policies.

25. Panellists, in both their responses and their concluding remarks, highlighted the importance of international cooperation and the need for the international community to consciously coordinate the efforts of civil society, Governments, and children themselves from the local level up to the global level. It was emphasized that the universal periodic review process could also play an important role in fighting sexual violence by encouraging States under review to make strong commitments and follow-up on these. On prevention, family was the first place to start. It was important to sensitize relevant professionals, ensure transparency, and provide special services and support to children particularly at risk. A few panellists highlighted the need to have safe, accessible reporting mechanisms and to develop a communications procedure aimed at bringing child rights abuses to the attention of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Patriarchal structures, the status of women, and the cycle of violence were mentioned among the root causes of sexual violence. It was suggested that protecting and promoting appropriate social norms in communities, as well as promoting the active participation of children could be part of the solution. It was highlighted that there was much to be learned from good practices in all regions of the world.

III. Protecting boys and girls from sexual violence: prevention and response

A. Introductory remarks and statements by panellists

26. The afternoon panel was devoted to “Protecting boys and girls from sexual violence: prevention and response”. The panellists included: Susana Villarán de La Puente, Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child; Victor Karunan, Chief of Adolescent Development and Participation at UNICEF; Najat Maalla M’Jid, Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and Eliana Restrepo, Deputy Director of Plan Colombia.

27. The meeting was opened by Ibrahim Salama, Director of the Human Rights Treaties Division of OHCHR. He highlighted that investing efforts and resources in prevention was the most effective way to reduce sexual violence against children. A holistic approach with multisectoral policies, programmes and plans, as well as plans of action, is crucial to prevent and address violence against children. Other measures include collecting reliable data to help raise awareness of the problem and develop effective measures; using internationally recognized indicators to measure their impact; investigating cases of sexual violence against children using child sensitive procedures and establishing child-friendly court procedures to prevent the re-victimization of victims; and ensuring easy access to child-sensitive counselling, complaint and reporting mechanisms.

28. Mr. Salama mentioned that the afternoon panel would focus on efforts of the international community to implement the goals and targets of the Rio de Janeiro Declaration and Call for Action to Prevent and Stop Sexual Exploitation of Children and

Adolescents (the Rio Declaration). He emphasized in particular the importance of ensuring the full participation of children themselves in all strategies and measures to prevent, respond and monitor violence, in accordance with article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

29. Ms. Villarán of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in her presentation on national, regional and international effective remedies, said that measures had to address the gap between policies and practices. She mentioned that the Committee, when reviewing the domestic laws of States, noted the lack of a single definition of sexual violence against children. However, at international level, the jurisprudence of the European Court on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court and Commission qualify sexual violence as torture, while international criminal law considers sexual violence as crime against humanity. The United Nations Study on Violence against Children also identified essential aspects to be considered when adopting preventive and protection measures. Therefore, in the creation of new legal instruments, she emphasized, the need to look at all existing international frameworks.

30. Ms. Villarán underlined that the Committee had also identified a number of preventive and protective measures. These included: legal reforms, such as the legal minimum age for marriage, criminal responsibility, sexual consent, as well as for accessing health services without parental consent; public policies and national plans with clear objectives and sufficient resources; measures to address cultural beliefs that condone sexual violence; guaranteeing that the right of the child to be heard; putting in place information systems with disaggregated data; prioritising prevention measures through education and the empowerment of children; and adopting measures to avoid re-victimization of the children.

31. The representative of UNICEF, Mr. Karunan, mentioned in his presentation on the empowerment and participation of children that sexual violence against children remained a neglected and hidden issue and only recently had the magnitude of the problem begun to attract the attention of policymakers and the public. He provided a few examples of child-led initiatives to combat sexual violence against children in Cambodia, India and Bangladesh. In this regard he underlined that practice standards on child participation to combat sexual violence should include an ethical approach to participation, participation that is relevant and voluntary, a child-friendly environment, and an effective follow-up and evaluation system to monitor progress and assess outcomes and impact of participation. He concluded by highlighting that children themselves were the best advocates against sexual violence; that child-led initiatives should become an integral part of policies and protection mechanisms to combat sexual violence against children; and that all efforts to curb and eradicate sexual violence must have the child's best interest at the centre, as well as children's agency and empowerment as central guiding principles.

32. The Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, Najat Maalla M'jid, when speaking about the follow-up to the Rio Congress and its Call for Action, noted that, despite considerable progress made, sexual exploitation of children and adolescents through the Internet and new technologies, via child trafficking and sexual tourism was still growing. Referring to the implementation of the Rio Plan of Action, Ms. Maalla M'Jid noted that States had still not universally ratified a number of pertinent international and regional instruments; some bodies of national law had not defined clearly nor had they criminalized all forms of sexual exploitation of children; many countries did not have mechanisms that children could access to report cases of sexual exploitation; work remained to be done with regard to putting in place inter and intrasectoral strategies to reinforce national protection services or to create new ones to provide all victims of sexual violence and their families with economic and psychological support and the means for social reintegration.

33. Additionally, Ms. Maalla M'jid favoured systematic participation of children in awareness-raising programmes as children were not just victims of sexual exploitation, but also part of the solution; there was scope for information exchange and technical assistance to developing countries regarding mechanisms to facilitate coordination at national, regional and international levels. Some businesses had adopted programmes in the area of social responsibility. Such initiatives should be extended to businesses involved in tourism, the Internet, media and entertainment. In conclusion, despite actions in many countries to combat sexual exploitation against children, much remained to be done and cooperation on this regard had to be intensified.

34. The Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms. Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, said that everyone had the obligation to ensure that children had access to adequate child-sensitive services and mechanisms guaranteeing their protection, effective preventive measures and adequate responses to sexual violence. She enumerated the measures taken by the Council of Europe to deal with this issue. These included elaborating a convention covering all forms of sexual violence (the Lanzarote Convention); providing guidance to countries to set their own national integrated strategies for the protection of children from violence; mainstreaming children's rights in a series of areas, including child-friendly social services and health, as well as child participation; and preparing to launch in 2010 a pan-European campaign to combat sexual violence against children. The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Convention) is an international legally binding instrument which is open to ratification by non-European countries. The Policy Guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence, promote the development of a holistic national framework to safeguard children's rights and protect them from violence. She concluded by describing the work done by the Council of Europe to define child friendly services particularly with regard to justice, social services and health care, and on child participation.

35. According to the Deputy Director of Plan Colombia, Eliana Restrepo, in order to tackle sexual violence, it was important to build a protection culture where values, cultural patterns and variables were taken into account. It was urgent to consider a cultural crossover where the State, civil society, communities, families and children all take part in the design of initiatives and intervene in a holistic and interdependent way. She highlighted that it is important to influence culture and social relationships also through awareness-raising actions. Mass media needed to become allies in educating the population and changing cultures. She indicated that Plan Colombia had trained 1,000 media professionals in recent years, helping them to understand children's rights and contributing to a more sensitive journalism on sexual violence.

36. Ms. Restrepo also added that it was necessary to strengthen the protective capacities of and the interaction with different actors. The various State institutions dealing with this issue must interact and coordinate. It is important that actions be carried out as interdependent and integral plans and not as sectoral plans, which have limited impact. Additionally, it was important to look for new allies in building protective networks, including the private sector. One example in that regard was the alliance between Plan Colombia and Banco Agrario. The bank committed to train 5,000 employees in the prevention of sexual violence against children and to offer training to its microcredit customers. That alliance would reach 88 per cent of Colombia's municipalities through its 900 branches. Violence prevention programmes in schools are also essential. The Plan Colombia representative concluded by stating that children could also become active in their own protection if they had access to training programmes that allowed them to identify and tackle risks relating to sexual violence, starting from childhood and continuing throughout their life. Plan Colombia had in fact been able to demonstrate that such

programmes were able to reduce the gaps generated inter alia by conditions such as environment, family and poverty.

B. Plenary discussion

37. In the interactive dialogue following the afternoon presentations, representatives of Spain (on behalf of the European Union), Paraguay, Senegal, Slovakia, Israel, South Africa, Belgium, Peru, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Morocco, the Maldives (speaking also on behalf Mauritius), Colombia, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Norway, Pakistan, Brazil, Algeria, Indonesia, Poland, Portugal, the United Arab Emirates, India, Argentina (speaking on behalf of the Common Market of the South, MERCOSUR), Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Japan, Finland, Thailand, the Holy See, Panama, Slovenia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lichtenstein and Egypt took the floor. Also speaking was a representative of End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT International).

38. There was general agreement among speakers that sexual crimes happened everywhere in the world and that violence against children was never justifiable. Most speakers agreed that it was critical to focus on prevention and one speaker highlighted that sexual violence against children was preventable when social and legal norms were respected. Many speakers warned about the danger presented by the use of new technologies, as well as the greater mobility in travel and tourism. In particular, sexual exploitation of children needed to be combated by strengthened common action. It was highlighted that there is still a considerable gap between policies on children's rights and their implementation and that cooperation between State and local authorities, and non governmental organizations and other partners was crucial. There were calls on States which had not yet done so to ratify the Convention and its two Optional Protocols.

39. A number of States described measures and policies taken at national level, including the development of specific legislation, policies and action plans; the obligation to report sexual violence against children; the development of awareness-raising and information campaigns; the creation of special police units dealing with this issue; working with heads of religious communities; the training of people working with minors; the establishment of free help lines; the development of programmes to teach children to protect themselves against the risks of Internet and other new technologies; the use of information technologies to increase awareness on and prevention of sexual crimes; legal provisions allowing children to directly access all State entities to claim the protection of their rights without being accompanied by a legal representative; the establishment of child advocacy centres; allocating funds for victims of sexual violence; criminalization of all forms of violence against children; the increase in penalties against child sex offenders; and the criminalization of sexual abuse of children abroad . Reference was also made to plans of action adopted at regional level.

40. Measures suggested for eliminating violence included: identifying root causes leading to sexual violence against children; devising and implementing feasible preventive strategies; formulating, strengthening and enforcing policies and laws on child protection; sensitising the public to the problem; creating a non-violent society ; promoting positive child-rearing methods; engaging children in prevention and response; and creating an environment in which children were self-confident, self assured and resistant. It was emphasized that coordination across United Nations mandates and between institutions would ensure that sexual violence against children in all its forms and settings was systematically addressed. Children should also be able to press for reparation and should be able to directly address State authorities.

41. Main questions included examples of child participation in fighting against sexual violence; if there was a single definition of sexual violence against children that would be generally applicable; the role of information and communication technologies in protecting children; modalities to strengthen the complaint filing processes locally and internationally in order to prevent cases of sexual violence against children. Many States enquired about best practices regarding the prevention and protection of children from sexual violence.

42. In their replies and concluding remarks, panellists emphasized that, on prevention, it was important to act upstream rather than downstream and to do preventive work with families and schools, where most of the problems with sexual violence occurred. Self-protection programmes for children were also an important element in controlling risks. The need to change mindsets was emphasized but this is a process that takes time. It was noted that there was a lack of a truly and holistic cross-cutting approach due primarily to a lack of a clear concept of the phenomenon, as it changed constantly. The Lanzarote Convention, which is open for ratification also by non-European States, was referred to as the only instrument which covered all forms of sexual violence against children, so it could serve as a comprehensive definition. In terms of complaints, a number of panellists highlighted the need for the Convention on the Rights of the Child to have an Optional Protocol for individual communications. It was emphasized that there was insufficient attention on the demand dimension, a root cause in itself, which should be addressed both at the national and global level. There was agreement that children should be treated as equal partners in the fight against sexual violence. Both the positive and negative roles of the media in this regard were highlighted.
