



**Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on
Violence against Children**

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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Geneva

March 2013

Mr. Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends

I am very pleased to present before you my annual report. The report builds upon the General Assembly's decision to extend, for a further period of three years, my mandate as Special Representative of the Secretary General. Marking the start of this new phase, the report highlights the most significant developments and strategic results achieved in the initial term of the mandate, and it identifies a priority agenda for the future to sustain and accelerate progress in children's protection from violence.

Thanks to the critical support of Member States and the strong partnerships developed with UN agencies and human rights bodies and mechanisms, regional organizations, national institutions, civil society partners and children themselves, visible strides have been made towards the prevention and elimination of violence against children.

Three years ago, the findings and recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children presented a unique opportunity to translate into practice an essential principle the Study had promoted: no violence against children is justifiable and all violence can be prevented.

Since then we have moved a long way. The UN Study remains a critical academic reference for our work; but in addition, it has become an influential policy tool. As a result, violence has gained visibility in the public debate and in the policy agenda, and tangible change is building momentum across regions.

In my role as independent global advocate on violence against children, I have been strongly committed to nurture and learn from this process of change, acting as a catalyst and bridge-builder, promoting information-sharing and cross fertilization of experiences, mobilizing political and social support to prevent and address persisting challenges, and stimulating evidence-based action to strengthen children's protection from violence.

With this aim, I have been eager to promote important and strategic goals.

Firstly, **the consolidation of the human rights foundation of our agenda**, through the ratification and implementation of core child rights treaties, and the promotion of new international standards.

The UN campaign for the universal ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, launched in 2010 by the Secretary General and supported by my own office alongside UN partners, has had a catalytic role in this process.

Since the launch of the campaign, 26 states have adhered to the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and more than two thirds of those not yet parties have formally committed to its ratification, in the context of the Universal Periodic Review or before human rights mechanisms. We are nearing universal ratification and I count on your support to make it a reality for all children around the world.

My mandate also joined other partners in the development of new international standards. The third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure gains a special relevance in this regard. The Protocol establishes effective remedies and promotes the development of child sensitive mechanisms and procedures for counselling, reporting and complaints to address violations of children's rights, including incidents of violence. It has received strong support from Member States, having been ratified by three countries and signed by more than 30. Many governments are working towards the ratification of this treaty. I am confident the Protocol will soon gather the necessary number of ratifications to ensure a swift entry into force and implementation on the ground.

Children are central to this process. For this reason, my office is preparing a **child friendly version of the Protocol to support children** with simple, accessible and useful information on the Protocol, and ways of using it safely and effectively. We hope to launch it in the course of the next few months.

Secondly, my mandate has been strongly committed to **raising awareness and deepening knowledge** about violence prevention and children's protection from violence exposure. With this in mind, I have joined hands with strategic partners in the **organization of seven expert consultations**. Policy makers, UN agencies, human rights institutions, civil society, academics and young people took part in these reflections to address root causes and risk factors of violence, reflect on persisting challenges, to disseminate positive experiences and present recommendations to assist governments in their national implementation efforts. The main outcomes of these consultations have been captured in significant **thematic studies** which can be downloaded from our website – now accessible in English, French and Spanish – and from the memory stick we have issued, and which I am pleased to share with you today.

Thirdly, **the institutionalization of partnerships with regional organizations and institutions** has been a cornerstone of my work. Violence against children knows no geographic, cultural or social boundaries and regional collaboration has been instrumental to reenergize political support and accountability for the protection of children from violence and to support developments at the national level. Since last year's session of the Council, four additional regional consultations were held: in the Dominican Republic, for Central America; in Jamaica for the Caribbean; in Sri Lanka for countries in South Asia; and in Turkey, for Member States of the Council of Europe.

In these and other regions very concrete results have been promoted, including the adoption of significant political commitments and roadmaps in seven regions, the establishment of monitoring review systems in most of them, and the development of four regional implementation studies to assess progress, and mobilise action to address persisting gaps and priority concerns. Moreover, special emphasis has been given to the promotion of cross regional and South-South cooperation and fertilization of experiences on violence prevention and responses. The work done on children's protection from harmful practices is a meaningful illustration of this process.

Distinguished Delegates

Field missions have been another essential strategy of my work. Country visits have helped to bring the mandate closer to national authorities, child protection institutions, and the public at large; and they have been critical to accelerate progress in the three priority areas identified by my mandate: namely the development of a well-coordinated and well-resourced national agenda on violence against children; the adoption of sound legislation to prohibit all forms of violence, protect child victims and fight impunity; and the consolidation of data and research to inform policy and budgetary decisions.

This process has led to significant results: the number of countries with a policy agenda on violence against children has almost doubled, having grown from 47 to more than 80; nations with an explicit legal prohibition of all forms of violence have widened from 16 to 34; and there has been a visible and incremental increase in the number of national surveys conducted on children's exposure to violence.

Field missions have equally been instrumental to meet with girls and boys, and benefit from their important views, perspectives and recommendations.

Young people are crucial partners of my mandate and have been active participants in regional consultations and expert discussions on violence against children. They act as a sounding board, helping to identify prevailing and emerging concerns and inform the process forward.

Children's declarations, manifestos and action plans have been a reinvigorating reference for our agenda. They remind us that a vision without action is only a dream, at times a devastating nightmare. And over and over again, children have made us realize that, without their genuine involvement, there is a risk of developing policies and programmes that may seem ideal and perfect, and yet miss serious risks and backlashes which can re-victimize the very same young people we are committed to protect.

Distinguished Delegates

As highlighted by this brief overview, the past three years have helped to build a unique momentum in favour of children's protection from violence. But our journey has only started!

This is also the main finding resulting from the global survey on violence against children conducted by my office and to which more than a hundred governments have contributed.

Despite significant developments across regions, progress remains uneven and needs nurturing to sustain achievements, scale up positive initiatives and widen the ownership of this significant process of social change.

We find ourselves at a cross roads. If efforts are not sustained and scaled up, the imperative of protecting children from violence may become diluted in the face of other competing priorities. Our important cause may end up being placed in a waiting slot, until pressing emergencies are dealt with. And progress achieved runs the risk of being inevitably undermined.

The truth is that there is a unique opportunity to capitalize on past gains and accelerate progress in our endeavour. But action is of essence!

I remain strongly committed to mobilise and further strengthen strategic partnerships in support of this process; to re-energize efforts to pursue a strategic agenda; and to secure firm, sustained and predictable funding for the effective and independent performance of my mandate.

The important lessons we have learned from past experience can guide us in the steps ahead. And the global survey on violence against children, reflected in my report, remains a critical reference for our future work.

The global survey confirms the relevance and urgency of consolidating and scaling up initiatives to achieve the three priority goals identified by my mandate. But in addition, it acknowledges emerging areas of concern which will need to be further researched and addressed. This is for instance the case of the opportunities and risks associated with the use of new information and communication technologies.

Secondly, the global survey highlights the serious and cumulative exposure of girls and boys to various manifestations of violence, in different contexts, and throughout the child's life cycle. To be effective, national strategies will need to be tailored to children's evolving stages of development.

In early childhood, it will be imperative to secure a safe and protective family environment and prevent irreversible risks in children's development and well-being. And in adolescence, it will be vital to invest in young people's skills and empowerment to prevent their stigmatization and manipulation in armed violence and criminal activities, and to capitalize on children's agency and potential for accelerating progress towards violence elimination.

In this process, it is critical to invest in the protection and social inclusion of the most vulnerable children, for whom the multiple dimensions of deprivation go hand in hand with a cumulative exposure to violence. The current economic crisis presents particularly acute challenges for them.

Severe cutbacks in social spending and budgetary austerity measures are shrinking family income, and leading to low investment in children's development and education, and enhanced risks of child abandonment; at the same time, we witness an intensification of situations of child abuse and exploitation, including child labour in the informal sector and in agriculture; and increased stress, violence and abuse in the home, in the school and in the community at large.

This brings me to my third priority. Violence does not take place in a vacuum. Factors such as poverty and marginalization, environmental degradation and natural disasters, poor rule of law and organized crime aggravate the risk of child maltreatment, neglect and abuse. Conversely, investment in the prevention of violence and in children's effective protection, with a priority attention to those at greater risk, contributes to social progress, consolidates good governance and safeguards respect for human rights. By the same token, it constitutes a core strategy to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

This is why it is critical to include the protection of children from violence as a priority and a cross-cutting concern in the global development agenda for beyond 2015. This is an occasion that cannot be missed!

I am confident you will join in this endeavour and I look forward to continuing to collaborate closely with you in the steps ahead.

Thank you.