

**Virtual High-Level Conference**

**“Towards an Africa free from Violence against Children”**

***Global perspectives on VAC***

**Statement of the SRSG VAC, Dr Najat Maalla M’jid**

**Thursday 22nd July 2021 on Zoom**

**2:00 pm – 4:00 pm (East African Time) 7:00 am – 9:00 am (NYC time)**

Excellencies, Distinguished participants, Ladies and gentlemen, all protocols observed

My dear sister Graca

It is a pleasure to contribute to this important Virtual High-Level Conference “Towards an Africa free from Violence against Children” organized by the African Partnership to End VAC and ACPF.

Ladies and gentlemen

We know that violence against children remains a **global problem, affecting every country and every region.**

Violence against children occurs **in many settings.** It happens in the circle of trust; it happens in schools; it happens in the community, including in the context of sports, cultural and religious organizations; it happens in institutions for the care and protection of children; it happens in detention facilities ; it happens on streets; it happens in travel and tourism : it happens in humanitarian settings and in conflicted areas; it happens online .

The same child could be victim of various forms of violence. Often, children sadly experience a **continuum of violence**

Violence against children has **devastating and life-long consequences** for the health and wellbeing of children. **In addition to the human cost, the economic cost of violence is significant.**

**The drivers of VAC** are multidimensional and interlinked, echoing the interlinkages among SDGs and the importance of an integrated approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda, 2040 and 2063 African Agendas .

We cannot hope to end violence against children if harmful social norms, if poverty, if hunger and food security, if lack of access to health, education, justice, social protection for the most vulnerable, decent work and living conditions, if social exclusion, inequalities, gender discrimination, if climate change, peace and human safety, and if impunity are not addressed. Equally, progress toward these 3 Agendas will be impeded if we do not end violence against children.

**In the last three decades**, Africa has made significant progress to fulfil international legal obligations enshrined under the Convention on the rights of the child RC and the African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child.

Many African countries have already conducted VAC national surveys, undertook legal reforms, developed national policies and strategies to end VAC, renewed their commitment. There are also important initiatives on child participation and child empowerment and a strong mobilization supported by a vibrant CSOs and community based organizations .

**However, VAC is still widespread**, due to weak of implementation of laws and policies, social disparities, lack of dedicated human and financial resources , political instability , unsafety and conflicts, impunity, persistent of harmful and discriminatory social norms and practices

Ladies and gentlemen

The situation was challenging before the pandemic. **COVID has magnified the problem.**

Almost 18 months has passed since the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic, we know the negative effects of the pandemic are more serious than what we could have imagined, it has:

* increased the risks of violence against children both at home and online as well as gender-based violence , that will have long lasting impacts
* It has left millions of orphan children, due to the loss of many parents and other caregivers resulting from COVID-19
* it has impacted children’s mental health and wellbeing
* it has exacerbated poverty and school drop out. It is estimated that an additional 142 million more children fell into poverty in 2020,[[1]](#footnote-1) increasing the risk of children being exposed to various forms of violence. Millions more children are likely to enter child labour and an additional 13 million girls are at risk of child marriage over the next decade.
* It has exacerbated existing inequalities, rendering those who were already more marginalized and vulnerable to violence before the pandemic to ever greater risks, including girls; poor children, children with disabilities; indigenous children and children from minorities, refugee, displaced and migrant children; children living or working on the streets; children in alternative care and children in detention, children in conflicted areas , among others.
* It has also increased, smuggling and trafficking in children by expanding both supply and demand,

**Despite the many challenges** posed by the pandemic, there have been examples of promising practices to tackle violence against children, worldwide and in Africa , including ; remote learning , reopening schools , strengthening child helplines , child services and justice online , providing mental health and psychosocial support, positive parenting, strengthening cash transfers and child grants

**Children and young people** have also played a critical role in response to the pandemic, providing vital support to their communities, families and peers and to those who have been hardest to reach, including children living or working on the street and those in remote areas

**But there is still a lot to do !**

Ladies and gentlemen

We are only 8 years away from 2030. Therefore, as we move forward, **we must move from a silo and reactive approach to a proactive, integrated and evidence-based approach. Our vision and our action must be broad.**

**It starts with proactive and sustainable prevention.** Prevention is the most effective way to end VAC and a growing pool of evidence is available to demonstrate successful approaches that are also relatively low-cost. An integrated, multi-sectoral and coherent national development agenda will also address the drivers of violence, such as poverty, inequalities, gender discrimination, harmful social norms, migration, exclusion and humanitarian crises, among other challenges.

**We must invest in integrated services for children**, such as health, mental health, child protection and welfare, education, child and gender sensitive, **including community-based and informal providers.**  **We must invest in an inclusive social protection**, to support the most vulnerable children, families and communities.

**We must rebuild trust in institutions. L**egal, policy and institutional frameworks must be properly resourced and well-staffed and must guarantee **accountability for the authorities** responsible for keeping children safe.  **We must build a strong child safeguarding culture** and provide reliable, child-friendly channels to report violence

**We must bring an end to impunity and corruption** and hold perpetrators accountable.

**Children must be heard and seen as part of the solution** and involved in all decisions aimed at preventing and responding to violence.

And we must ensure **all stakeholders are collaborating effectively** to end all forms of violence against children. There is a **great deal of work already being done**. At the global level, there are many networks, partnerships and alliances championing this cause.

**Regional organizations – such the African Union, the regional economic communities, which are represented at this meeting today –** are also playing a key role through their standard setting, monitoring and awareness-raising activities. And of course, **the African Partnership to End VAC**, in close cooperation with national and local governments, private sector, UN system, civil society, faith-based and community-based organizations, children and young people, play a crucial role in this process with strong advocacy, support and peer learning.

We must **seek out synergies** to ensure a truly complementary approach.

**Partnership is the only path to success.** To this end, I congratulate the African Partnership to End VAC for the work achieved with the 3 reports launched today that will guide Member States to address VAC with an evidenced based approach.

Ladies and gentlemen

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that a paradigm shift in favour of children is long overdue - a shift that treats **spending** on integrated across social services as well as sustainable and inclusive SOCIAL PROTECTION for children and their caregivers **as an investment for an inclusive, resilient and sustainable recovery, that should be reflected in the national development plans and economic recovery plans, maximizing coverage and impact for all children, leaving no one behind.**

The recovery from the pandemic should be an occasion to transform the **development model of Africa while strengthening good governance, safeguarding human rights and sustaining peace, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the African Child Agenda 2040 and   Agenda 2063**

**Let’s not forget that the future of Africa is today with its children. With sixty per cent of the population in Africa under 25, Africa is the youngest continent.**

**Let’s not forget that African Children and young people represent a strong human capital to protect and to invest on, NOW !**

I thank you for your attention.

1. See United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Child Poverty and COVID-19’ web page. New York, UNICEF (<https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-poverty/covid-19/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)