

Declaration of the Young Persons of the Caribbean

Kingston, Jamaica, 15 May 2012

We, child and youth representatives from the Caribbean have gathered in Jamaica for the Violence against Children Sub-Regional Conference to proclaim the present Declaration:

Violence can be described as using your position of power or strength to inflict intentional damage to someone. This may include emotional or mental damage and not merely the physical.

Violence or any violent environment is not fit for a child. Children are more sensitive than adults realize. Things mean much more to a child than what an adult can see.

Violent acts against children affect them as it changes their lives forever. A child will never remain the same after. A damaged childhood leads to a damaged personality, development of trust issues, attachments issues and such. And this would lead to a damaged society where other children will grow up continuing the cycle and showing no improvement.

Violence happens in the family and home. Children are physically, emotionally, psychologically and verbally abused. Children are also being neglected by parents in the home. There are also incidents in the family homes where children are being sold into prostitution and other situations of trafficking. Violence happens in the school environment, including verbal and physical abuse and sexual abuse by teachers. Where student or children's councils exist, the children are sometimes not respected or listened to and adults/principals still have the last word.

In the community is where much of the violence against children happens. All forms of abuse are inflicted upon children in the community – physically, emotionally, psychologically and sexually. Churches in the communities also promote corporal punishment and they believe 'spare the rod, spoil the child'.

Violence happens in the workplace. Child labour is present and the business owners' abuse children in order to gain an edge over their competition. So now, it can be said, that violence occurs everywhere in society.

Violence against children in the Caribbean continues to be the norm or tradition in the region and is being passed on to our generations. This makes violence against children harder to eradicate. Therefore drastic actions need to be taken now.

We, the child and youth delegates from the Caribbean, call on the governments of the region, those with the power and authority, to pay a listening ear to our views and solutions. The Study is about violence against children in the Caribbean, so we are the victims and believe that we know solutions to the problem.

We the children and youth also have a responsibility as there are incidents of violence against children by other children. Therefore we should wise up and cooperate with the move against violence.

Adults who work with children daily are also responsible for solving the problem. People such as teachers, parents, the police and more should work and cooperate with the solutions established by the government.

We recommend that:

Children need to be aware of their rights

Knowledge of children's rights and responsibilities should be integrated into the school curriculum to ensure that the effect is wide-reaching.

Stakeholders in children's development, that is, teachers, parents and other caregivers should be knowledgeable of the rights of children

These stakeholders need to be educated on such matters in order that they can be better held accountable for the infringements of these rights. Increased public awareness would enable the penalties for such infringements to be stricter.

Prevention orientated programs need to be established

Stakeholders in child development need to be made aware of the negative physical and psychological effects of violence on children and should be made aware of other alternatives to discipline. Specific attention needs to be placed on the approach which is taken to inform stakeholders. The approach should be far-reaching, suited and applicable to the audience which it is targeting. It is hoped that educating the masses on the effects and alternatives to Child Violence would allow for such acts to be prevented.

Enforce our solutions and rights into laws and create effective support systems to promote the advancements of rights

We are knowledgeable of the fact that support systems exist for the advancement of Children's rights especially as it relates to abuse against children. However the systems tend to be excessively bureaucratic which affects the efficiency of the organization. The delaying and retraining of staff in these arrangements need to be considered as well as resourced.

More trained and resourced personnel to enforce laws

More opportunities need to be provided to training in the areas of Social Work and Regional Development. Scholarships and internships could be provided as incentives to motivate individuals to pursue these areas of study.

When children do decide to report, the process needs to be easy and friendly to children; ensure people/staff are properly trained to know how to work with children and create friendly environments

The smooth process of reporting would be motivation to the victimized children to continue reporting and not be afraid to come forward. The way in which reports are addressed need to be more responsive as this could increase the confidence us children place in these established institutions.

Children need to support other children

The support of other children in the fight to get our rights publicized can be very influential in shattering the silence that exists between the problem the child encounters and the solution.

Children need to be involved in finding the solution

The involvement of children in finding the solutions necessary to remedy and prevent these problems can increase the chance of these problems being corrected.

Appropriate psychosocial support in place to know how to handle case of abuse

Specialization is necessary when dealing with emotionally laden issues, as this increases the level of effectiveness and improved results for the children.

Need resources and supports to implement rights and actions at the regional and sub-regional levels

The implementations of certain resources that could increase the coordination between nations would better aid in the fight against violence against children. The establishment of networks across the regions not only formal conferences but informal opportunities where information can be continuously exchanged and countries can advance in unity to eradicate violence once and for all.