



## **EIGHTH CROSS-REGIONAL MEETING FOR ADVANCING THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM VIOLENCE**

Thimphu, 9-11 May 2018

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

We, the participants in the Eighth Cross-Regional Round Table for advancing the protection of children from violence promoted by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children (SRSG on VAC) and hosted with the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) and the Royal Government of Bhutan, coming from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); the African Union; the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); the African Child Policy Forum; the Council of Europe Secretariat; the Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat; the Inter-American Children's Institute of the Organization of American States (IIN-OAS); the Institute for Public Policies and Human Rights of El Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR); the Central American Social Integration Secretariat of the Central American Integration System (SICA); the Latin American and Caribbean Movement for Children; and the South Asia Coordinating Group on Accelerated Action to End Violence against Children (SACG);

Recognizing the critical role played by intergovernmental Regional Organizations and Institutions as catalysts of change in the promotion of enhanced accountability for children's rights, including their right to freedom from violence, and acknowledging the value of pursuing cooperation with civil society and child-led organizations;

Valuing the SRSG's support to the strengthening of regional commitment, processes and initiatives, and to enhancing cross-regional and South-South cooperation, as well as to the promotion and monitoring of regional progress towards the full implementation of the recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children and towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children, as pledged by the international community in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

Noting with appreciation the platform for dialogue and communication initiated and led by the SRSG with Regional Organizations and Institutions as an important mechanism, in the framework of the United Nations, to share knowledge and good practices, facilitate cross-fertilization of experiences, coordinate efforts, enhance synergies, identify trends and anticipate future challenges and contribute to accelerating progress in children's protection from violence;

Welcoming the SRSG's leading advocacy to promote, in cooperation with Regional Organizations and Institutions, the inclusion in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of violence against children as a distinct and cross-cutting priority concern and

the significant steps that have been further pursued in support of an effective implementation process towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children;

Stressing the strategic opportunity presented by the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its specific targets on violence against children (4.7, 4a, 5.2, 5.3, 8.7, 11.7), and especially target 16.2 towards ending all forms of violence against children, as well as its targets on ensuring children's access to justice and to accountable and child-friendly institutions, to mobilize increased commitment, action and resources for the safeguarding of children's right to freedom from violence and from fear, and the key role of intergovernmental Regional Organizations and Institutions in promoting regional support and national action, including through the promotion of a holistic and widely participatory national sustainable development agenda supported by adequate national and ODA resources for the protection of children's rights, to accelerate progress on these SDG targets as well as contributing towards global monitoring and reporting on implementation of the 2030 Agenda;

Reaffirming our strong commitment to further accelerate and assess progress achieved in the implementation of the recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children in our respective regions, and to reinforce our co-operation in the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children to advance progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and recognizing that investment in creating peaceful lives for children contributes to a peaceful world for everyone;

Recognizing the opportunity to strengthen collaboration and accelerate progress in children's protection from violence with the development and implementation in various regions of regional strategies to advance the 2030 Agenda and strengthen the protection of children's rights, and the importance of ensuring children's participation in this process;

Having examined the follow-up provided to the conclusions and recommendations of the seventh Cross-Regional Round Table, held in Manila in 2017, and recalling the significant developments promoted over the past year, including the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration of the 2017 High Level Political Forum which recognized children, adolescents and youth as important agents of change and underlined the necessity of investing in them with a view to addressing multidimensional deprivations, ending intergenerational poverty, harnessing the demographic dividend and empowering them to build a more prosperous future; and committed to including children's perspectives in the development and assessment of strategies and programmes designed to address their specific needs and underscored the importance of supporting young people's participation in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda, as well as stressing the need to protect their human rights and to eliminate all forms of discrimination, violence and coercion against them, including the elimination of all harmful practices;<sup>1</sup>

Welcoming the high-level side event held during the 2017 HLPF in which the recommendations from the 7th Cross Regional Meeting were highlighted;

Welcoming also the new report by the SRSG, 'Violence Prevention must start in early childhood', issued as a follow-up to the Conclusions and Recommendations of the 2017 Cross-Regional Meeting;

Reaffirming our strong commitment to reinforce our co-operation in the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children and to further accelerate and assess progress achieved, including by supporting countries in their implementation efforts, in the

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<sup>1</sup> E/HLPF/2017/L.2

mainstreaming of SDG violence-related targets in their national plans, policies, laws and budgets; and in the strengthening of gender-sensitive data systems on children's exposure to violence;

Recognizing the strategic opportunity provided by the annual session of the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and the development of voluntary national reviews to promote and assess progress towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children, as foreseen by SDG target 16.2 and other violence-related targets in the 2030 Agenda;

Recalling that in 2018 the HLPF will focus on "Building resilient societies and cities" and will provide a strategic opportunity to support the leadership of mayors and local authorities in placing the rights of the child at the heart of city planning, as well as to promote safe and inclusive urban spaces for all children, guided by the best interests of the child and informed by children's views and experiences;

Recalling further that half of the world's population lives in cities and half of that population are children, and that increasing urbanization, combined with high levels of economic inequality and endemic poverty, make the risk of urban violence particularly acute;

Recognizing that in 2019 the HLPF will be devoted to "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality" during which Sustainable Development Goal 16, including target 16.2 on ending all forms of violence against children, will be addressed

Further recognizing that in 2019 the UN General Assembly will hold its first review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and that 2019 will also mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, thus presenting a unique opportunity to further mobilize global action in violence prevention and response;

Recalling that in societies around the world, there are positive practices that promote the protection of the rights of the child and ensure a nurturing environment for children's development and wellbeing;

Expressing serious concern at the prevalence of traditional and emerging harmful practices<sup>2</sup> in all regions, including child, early and forced marriage, and the devastating consequences they can have on the enjoyment of children's rights, including to life, survival and development, health, education, and protection from violence, as well as the negative impact they have on nations' development and economic growth;

Recalling that harmful practices are often rooted in deep-seated social norms condoned by unwritten or customary laws, superstitious beliefs and negative perceptions, and that such practices can also be driven by poverty, fear and insecurity and children's lack of access to education opportunities;

Recalling further that harmful practices are often a manifestation of gender-based discrimination rooted in structural inequality, gender stereotypes, perceptions and customs, imbalanced power relations and discriminatory social and legal norms, and emphasizing the close interlinkages between violence against women and violence against children

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<sup>2</sup> Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices, CEDAW/C/GC/31-CRC/C/GC/18

Recognizing the need to consolidate evidence on how girls and boys experience violence, including sexual violence, throughout their childhood and adolescence, and welcoming in this regard the launch of the Global Study on the sexual exploitation of boys;

Recognizing that ending harmful practices will help to achieve the SDGs, including the goals to end poverty (Goal 1); hunger (Goal 2); good health and well-being (Goal 3); inclusive and quality education (Goal 4); gender equality (Goal 5); economic growth (Goal 8); reduce inequalities (Goal 10) and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16);

Welcoming the important initiatives promoted by the United Nations, as well as regional organizations and institutions, civil society organizations and faith-based organizations to prevent and respond to harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage;<sup>3</sup>

Recognizing that out of seven billion people in the world today, more than five billion identify themselves as members of religious communities, and that religious and community leaders play a decisive role in the protection of children's rights, including in the prevention of and response to violence, in particular by helping to enhance awareness amongst families and communities about the detrimental impact of violence against children, including harmful practices; by clarifying that violence against children cannot be legitimized by religion; and by supporting processes of social change that can lead to the lasting abandonment of social norms that condone violence against children;

Concerned by the vulnerability of children affected by migration and refugee situations and stressing the need to protect them from all forms of violence and discrimination, including on the ground of their migration status, as well as the need to increase cooperation between regions to ensure a continuum of protection of the rights of the child, including freedom from all forms of violence and access to quality child protection services in countries of origin, transit and destination;

1. **Welcome the significant progress made over the past year** towards the protection of children from all forms of violence, including the increased number of:

- ratifications of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>4</sup> and other international and regional child rights legal instruments;
- comprehensive national legislation to ban all forms of violence against children in all settings,<sup>5</sup> including corporal punishment within the family; as well as to strengthen children's legal protection from harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, including in the context of plural legal systems;
- national multi-sectoral integrated strategies to prevent and address violence against children, at times as a core component of the national development plan<sup>6</sup>;
- comprehensive regional baseline studies and national surveys conducted in different regions to assess the prevalence and severity of children's exposure to physical,

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<sup>3</sup> These include, inter alia, the resolutions on child, early and forced marriage adopted by the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council, as well as those by adopted Heads of State of la Francophonie and by the Commonwealth, and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence

<sup>4</sup> OPSC ratified by 174 states and OPCP by 37 states as of early May 2018

<sup>5</sup> Most recently by Ireland, Lithuania, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Paraguay, Peru, Slovenia and Vietnam

<sup>6</sup> Most recently in Cambodia, France, Mexico, Paraguay and Tanzania

- emotional and sexual violence, in some cases including innovative modules on aspects of violence such as online abuse, bullying and cyberbullying<sup>7</sup>;
- information and awareness-raising campaigns to build a culture of respect for children’s rights and freedom from violence, and to promote change in attitudes and behaviour that condone violence against children, and break the invisibility surrounding this phenomenon;
  - initiatives led by children and young people to advocate for children’s protection from violence, to raise awareness about the detrimental impact of violence on child development and wellbeing, and to inform the development of policies and legislation to prevent and eliminate violence against children;
  - **regional plans** to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against children, as well as initiatives to combat extreme forms of violence and crimes against children, aligned with the 2030 Agenda, such as:
    - Agenda 2063 The Africa We Want and Africa’s Agenda for Children 2040,
    - The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems to Prevent
    - The SAIEVAC Regional Action Plan to End Child Marriage in South Asia (2015-2018)
    - The SAIEVAC Regional Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of All Forms of Child Labour in South Asia (2016 – 2021)
    - The SAIEVAC strategy on child sexual abuse and exploitation, including online safety
    - The ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children
    - The Council of Europe Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2016-2021).
    - The CBSS Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea States (2017-2020)
  - **global initiatives** to promote a culture of prevention of violence to safeguard the social capital of nations and the protection of children from violence, as well as to consolidate evidence to advance and monitor progress, including the End Violence Solutions Summit, IV Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour and the launch of the Alliance 8.7 to bring an end to child labour and modern slavery, the launch of the *Global Task Force on Access to Justice for All*, the SRSR report *Violence Prevention must start in early childhood*, UNICEF report *A Familiar Face*<sup>8</sup>, the global report *Ending Violence in Childhood*<sup>9</sup>, ECPAT Study *Towards a global indicator on unidentified victims in child sexual exploitation material*, and the INSPIRE guide to programme implementation to end violence against children and the Indicator Compendium to track progress and align reporting, as well as the Joint General Comments on *The general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration* and on *State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Most recently in Botswana, Rwanda, Uganda, Lesotho, Mozambique and Namibia; the survey in the Philippines addressed the issue of online abuse, while the survey being prepared in China addresses bullying.

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_101397.html](https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_101397.html)

<sup>9</sup> <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/ending-violence-childhood-global-report-2017>

<sup>10</sup> CRC/C/GC/22 and CRC/C/GC/23

2. **Reaffirm our determination to further promote individual and joint initiatives** to invest in a culture of prevention of violence against children that addresses the underlying drivers of violence, and which has a high return for society and for the wellbeing of children, to review progress made within and across regions, to consolidate achievements made and address the significant challenges that continue to hamper the realization of children's rights and their protection from all forms of violence with a particular emphasis on vulnerable children, such as those who are seeking asylum, who are refugees, those affected by migration, children deprived of their liberty, children with disabilities, children with albinism, those living in street situations or in extreme poverty, those impacted by financial crisis, those who experience discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, those affected by armed conflict, gang and community violence, political instability, those displaced by natural disasters and those living in other emergency situations, as well as to address the transnational dimensions of child protection;
3. **Express deep concern at the social tolerance, pervasiveness and severity** of violence against children, its long-lasting impact on child victims and high cost for society, and recognizing that this phenomenon remains hidden, concealed and unreported and is surrounded by stigma and by a deep sense of impunity;
4. **Commit to further enhance strategic partnerships** to accelerate progress in this endeavour, including with States, national institutions, Ombuds for children, civil society, professional associations, faith-based organizations, traditional leaders, academia, the media, the private sector, as well as children themselves;
5. **Commit to mobilize support for the realization of the vision in the 2030 Agenda for peaceful, just and inclusive societies**, and particularly towards achievements of SDG Target 16.2 to end all forms of violence against children, and the other violence against children related targets (4.7, 4a, 5.2, 5.3, 8.7, 11.7) by promoting a cross-sectoral approach and strengthening implementation of comprehensive national strategies for violence prevention and elimination supported by adequate resources; strengthening and enforcing national legislation on children's protection from all forms of violence; promoting cross-sectoral cooperation guided by the best interests of child among professionals working for and with children to ensure effective access to child-friendly services, including access to justice and to child-sensitive counselling, complaint and reporting mechanisms, and to universal birth registration of children; and by enhancing data systems, with high-quality, timely and reliable disaggregated data, and to promote and engage in the follow-up and review of this agenda through strong accountability mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels;
6. **Express commitment to continue to build upon the opportunities and momentum provided by the UN Study on Violence against Children and the process of implementation of the 2030 Agenda** to trigger urgent political action and public support to safeguard children's protection from violence and accelerate progress towards achieving the SDG targets on violence against children, especially target 16.2, including by promoting high-level policy fora, as well as the development and implementation of regional plans aligned with the 2030 Agenda; to collect, analyse and publicize data on violence against children and to report on progress achieved, including through the Voluntary National Reviews in the framework of the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda; to document and consolidate positive developments, address priority areas of concern and accelerate progress in this area; to organize a multi-stakeholder debate on violence against children and associate public figures and authoritative voices committed to this cause to generate awareness about the pervasiveness and serious

impact of violence on children, and to mobilize wide support to build a world free from fear and violence for all children at all times;

7. **Express commitment to create a culture of children's empowerment and the genuine and ethical participation of children and adolescents in all matters affecting them, and to help place children at the heart of the implementation and review of progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with a specific focus on the promotion of SDG target 16.2;**
8. **Welcome the significant initiatives promoted at the regional level to support child participation and empowerment, and express commitment to further pursue initiatives that prioritize prevention**, including through engagement with children to enhance awareness of their rights and strengthen their skills and capacities to identify and prevent risks, and secure their effective protection; through support to child victims and survivors of violence to enable them to express their views in a safe and empowering environment at all stages of reporting, referral, investigation and follow-up processes; and through support to survivors in their recovery and reintegration.
9. **Welcome the valuable work of the SRSG to consolidate knowledge on children's protection from all forms of violence, including on violence prevention in early childhood, the voices of children with parents deprived of liberty, and ensuring a continuum of protection for migrant and refugee children, and for her influential advocacy** to mobilize support for the effective implementation of laws and policies, and the consolidation of data to prevent and respond to this/these serious form(s) of violence,
10. **Express commitment to accelerate progress in children's protection from all forms of violence, including harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage**, in the framework of efforts towards the achievement of violence-related SDG targets, in particular 16.2 and 5.3;
11. **Agree to report back on the progress achieved at the 2019 Cross-Regional meeting;**
12. **Reaffirm our commitment to continue to support the SRSG in her efforts** at the global, regional and national levels to strengthen children's protection from violence and to promote cooperation across sectors and institutions, and to put into practice the measures necessary to prevent it and address it as a matter of urgency, and to accelerate achievement of the SDG targets on violence against children, especially 16.2 to end all forms of violence against children;
13. **Express profound gratitude to the Regional Secretariat of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children** for co-organizing the 2018 Cross-Regional meeting on Violence against Children, and to the Royal Government of Bhutan for kindly hosting it;
14. **Welcome the invitation extended by the African Child Policy Forum to host the 2019 Cross- Regional Meeting of Regional Organizations and Institutions, as well as the invitation extended by the Central American Integration System to host the meeting in 2020.**