



**STATEMENT BY THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL  
ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN**

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**HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

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Mme Chairperson

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear Friends

I am very pleased to present before you my third report to the Human Rights Council. I would like to thank you for the very fruitful collaboration developed over the past year and for the strong support to my mandate and to the protection of children from violence. I also want to acknowledge the strong partnerships with civil society with whom I am privileged to closely work, and the excellent collaboration enhanced with UN human rights mandates and normative and operational agencies. Sharing a common normative human rights foundation and a strong determination to protect the rights of the child, our excellent cooperation has been critical to achieve progress in violence prevention and elimination across regions.

Distinguished Delegates,

The recent months have been marked by important international developments. As you know, the normative foundation of children's protection from violence was strengthened with the adoption of the ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, and very especially with last week's opening for signature of the third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure. Moreover, the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted a new and important General Comment on children's freedom from violence, and the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly held strategic discussions respectively on the rights of children working and or living on the street, and of children with disabilities, providing increased visibility about risks of violence and insightful guidance on ways to prevent children's exposure to this phenomenon.

Encouraged by these momentous developments, the second year of my mandate was crucial to rally firm support to address persisting challenges and speed up global progress towards a world free from violence. Over the past months important initiatives were promoted.

Firstly, the promotion of global advocacy to raise awareness and strengthen political action to consolidate children's protection from violence - to achieve this goal, the promotion of the universal ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child was actively pursued, strategic thematic expert consultations were held, and important field missions conducted in all regions.

Secondly, as captured in the Annex to my report, special emphasis was given to the widening and further consolidation of partnerships with regional organizations and political groupings. As a result, important regional consultations were held and strong political commitments made towards children's protection from all forms of violence. These developments were crucial to support States in their national implementation efforts.

Thirdly, a global survey on violence against children was launched to assess and accelerate progress in this critical agenda.

**Support to the global campaign for the universal ratification of the Optional Protocols** remained a key dimension of my mandate. Joining efforts with United Nations partners, regional organizations, Member States and civil society organizations significant progress has been achieved in this area.

At present, the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography is in force in 154 countries. Since the launch of the campaign 17 States have adhered to this treaty and many others are taking steps towards ratification. Several countries have introduced critical legislative reforms to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation – in some cases, in the Constitution itself. Others have promoted information campaigns, the development of national plans and the set-up of inter-ministerial committees to guide the process of implementation.

At present, only 39 countries have not yet adhered to the Protocol. Of those, at least 23 have made formal commitments to the ratification of the Protocol in the context of the Universal

Periodic Review of the Council, or before the Committee on the Rights of the Child or other human rights mechanisms.

Most of these countries have also ratified other international conventions on the same areas covered by the Protocol: 49% of these States are parties to the Palermo Protocol on trafficking in persons, and 74% to the ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

In other words, a strong momentum has been built and universal ratification of the Protocol is truly within reach. I count on your support to make it a reality!

Distinguished Delegates,

Another key component of my advocacy agenda has been the organization of **expert consultations on strategic dimensions of children's protection from violence.**

In the past year, three consultations were held on law reform, on violence in education and on children in the justice system. Over the next few months, three other expert meetings will be promoted on data and research on violence against children, on harmful practices and on violence prevention in early childhood.

**The consultation on violence against children within the juvenile justice system** was organized last January, in Vienna, in cooperation with the OHCHR, UNODC and the Austrian Government. Framed by international standards adopted in this field, and building upon the important work promoted by the Human Rights Council and positive national experiences, the meeting identified risks and systemic weaknesses leading to children's exposure to violence, and anticipated critical strategies to prevent and respond to this phenomenon, including by shifting away from punitive approaches and investing in prevention and in child centered reintegration solutions. The expert consultation was particularly timely as it preceded tomorrow's thematic debate on children's rights and the administration of justice, in which I am very much looking forward to participate.

Two other expert consultations were organized last year, on law reform and violence in schools.

As you know, **legal reform to prohibit, prevent and respond to incidents of violence against children is a key priority for my mandate.** This is also an area where significant progress has been made over the recent past. When the UN Study was finalized, 16 countries had legislation prohibiting violence against children in all settings. At present, this number has doubled and in some cases a comprehensive legal ban has been incorporated in the Constitution itself. In a number of countries, including Philippines and Brazil, new laws are expected to be enacted in the very near future.

Detailed legal provisions have also been adopted in a large number of states to address specific forms of violence, including bullying, sexual abuse and exploitation, corporal punishment, trafficking and harmful traditional practices; in others legislation has focused on specific settings where violence may occur – for example in schools, as was recently the case in Belize and Peru; or in the home, as the legislation on domestic violence recently enacted in Pakistan meaningfully illustrates.

The expert meeting on law reform reached important conclusions and recommendations. Amongst them, two gain a particular relevance:

Firstly, law reform is an indispensable building block of a robust national child protection system; and it is also an on-going process which cannot be reduced to isolated or fragmented interventions. It requires harmonization with international standards, and steady implementation and identification of potential gaps and emerging challenges; to be effectively enforced, it needs to be backed up by a sustained process of advocacy and public information, and capacity building and guidance to those caring for children, and it calls for a periodic evaluation of progress and the impact achieved. With this far-reaching approach, legislation lays the foundation for a culture of respect for children's rights and can trigger lasting change in the social acceptance of violence against children.

Secondly, to protect children from violence, legislation needs to convey a clear and unequivocal message that children need to be protected from violence in all its forms; but this overall

prohibition needs to be complemented by detailed provisions in specific pieces of legislation to prevent and address this practice in all settings, and secure children's protection at all times.

**Violence in schools remains a challenge for many children around the world.** For this reason, an important expert consultation was jointly organized, in Oslo, with the Government of Norway and the Council of Europe, in which the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education also participated.

The conclusions and recommendations from the Oslo meeting are included in my annual report and addressed in the publication *Tackling Violence in Schools: bridging the gap between standards and practice*, launched yesterday in a side event in which many of you participated.

The report highlights two faces of education. On the one hand, children's right to cultivate creative talents and critical thinking, gain life skills, grow with dignity and confidence, and learn and internalize values of solidarity, tolerance and respect, and peaceful solution of conflicts.

On the other hand, the contrasting universe endured by thousands of school children exposed to violence by teachers, school staff or their own peers, from playground fighting, verbal abuse and intimidation, to corporal punishment, sexual abuse and at times gang violence.

Although statistical information on violence in education remains scarce and fragmented, available data reveals the serious incidence and the long-lasting consequences of this phenomenon, both on children and their families, and on the education system and, not less importantly, on the human capital and economic development of a nation.

I am confident that our thematic report will help to raise awareness of the important initiatives promoted across nations to prevent and address violence against children in schools, and also to mobilize action to ensure children's right to learn in a safe environment where fear, discrimination and violence have no place.

Distinguished Delegates,

**Consolidation of strategic partnerships with regional organizations and institutions is a cornerstone of my work** to advance progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children.

Regional collaboration has been instrumental to reenergize political support, to capture positive developments, identify concerns and persisting challenges, and mobilize vigorous action to safeguard children's freedom from violence in all regions.

This process has been marked by the adoption of significant political declarations and regional agendas, and in some cases has led to the establishment of high level monitoring mechanisms to assess progress and galvanize efforts to advance this agenda steadily forward. Our recent publication *Political Commitments by Regional Organizations and Institutions to Prevent and Address Violence against Children* illustrates this well.

Over the recent past, new developments have consolidated this important process: the adoption of the Santo Domingo Declaration by the regional consultation for Central American countries, Mexico and Cuba; and the strategic framework of cooperation signed with the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Women and Children. In the near future, three regional consultations will be held, in MERCOSUR, in South Asia and in the Caribbean; and an important conference will be convened in Dakar on national child protection systems in sub-Saharan Africa.

During the General Assembly I was honoured to host a High-Level Round Table on violence against children with representatives of regional organizations and institutions. The meeting provided a sound platform to reflect achievements made and advance progress within regions, and it launched a new stage for the promotion of cross-regional cooperation and fertilization of experiences. I am confident the Human Rights Council will lend its sustained support to these important initiatives.

Distinguished Delegates,

To gain perspective on progress achieved, reflect on good practices and factors of success, and support countries in their efforts to overcome persisting challenges, I am conducting a **global survey on violence against children**. The survey questionnaire was shared with Member States and a wide range of partners, and is promoted in close cooperation with UN agencies and child rights actors.

I am happy to report that we have received reports from some 90 governments, with more responses still coming in. I would like to encourage those governments that have not yet done so to submit their contributions, to enable us to take them into account.

I am strongly committed to incorporate in the survey the views and recommendations of children and young people. For this reason, I have joined hands with civil society partners to develop a child friendly version of the survey and capture the views and perspectives of young people.

The outcomes of the global survey will inform my next report to the General Assembly. The report will help to map progress and sustain the momentum built so far.

From our initial analysis, an evolving picture is emerging from the information received so far. We see a picture where violence against children is becoming part of the national agenda, with increasing legislative action, policy interventions, and information campaigns to safeguard children's freedom from violence, and with some promising initiatives to capture the magnitude and incidence of this phenomenon on children's daily lives.

But we also see a picture where progress is uneven, with insufficient efforts to develop a cohesive and well-resourced national agenda on violence against children; with uncoordinated, dispersed and often reactive interventions, and fragmented pieces of legislation; insufficient investment in family support, in the capacity building of professionals and in safe and child sensitive mechanisms to address incidents of violence; and overall, with a frequent lack of data and research to help break the invisibility of this phenomenon, fight impunity and promote evidence based decision making.

Clearly, there is a pressing need to pursue our efforts and rally behind a forward looking agenda to sustain the momentum our joint efforts have helped to generate, and promote a paradigm shift in children's protection from violence.

This year the General Assembly will review my mandate, including with regard to its funding. I believe that there is a very strong case for the continuation of the agenda. The past two years have seen important progress, but it is progress that needs nurturing. We must make sure that these advancements take root and are spread more evenly to cover every child, everywhere and at all times.

I look forward to continue to collaborate with you all in the steps ahead.

Thank you.