



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON
VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

PRESS RELEASE

UN concerned over increase of violence against children

San José, Costa Rica, June 6, 2014— Reducing risks associated with the use of technology and promoting its beneficial potential is the theme of the International Consultation organized by the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations organized in Costa Rica with the support of UNICEF, in cooperation with the Costa Rican government and opened by Vice President of the Republic, Ms. Ana Helena Chacon Echeverria.

Given the increasing number of cases of violence against children in Costa Rica, UN agencies and partner organizations working in children's rights seek to establish dialogue platforms to enhance cooperation to prevent and eliminate the phenomenon that affects thousands of children and adolescents in Costa Rica and the world.

UNICEF data indicates that each year, 150 million girls and 53 million boys are victims of sexual exploitation. Only in Costa Rica, in 2012, 49,000 violations of the rights of children were reported, a figure that increased by four thousand cases in 2013, according to the National Child Welfare reported.

"Violence against children is still a sad reality in the vast majority of countries. The cases of abuse involving the use of information technologies and communication are of particular concern to governments, parents and caregivers as well as children." emphasized Tanya Chapuisat, UNICEF Representative in Costa Rica.

"Internet and mobile phones are essential tools to support access of children and adolescents to information and education and to ensure the exercise of their rights. At the same time, these technologies generate significant risks for children that must be fought", emphasized Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations on Violence against Children.

More than 50 foreign and local experts will participate in the consultation that will promote strategies and mechanisms to strengthen advocacy, legislation and public policies aimed at preventing violence and protecting children and adolescents from violence by using of new information technologies and communication. The results of this consultation will be presented to the United Nations General Assembly, in October.

"The decision to organize this International Consultation in the country is a recognition of leadership that Costa Rica has in this important topic. Costa Rica has taken crucial steps to reduce the risks associated with the use of new technologies, including strong legislation and vast digital education programs to empower children and to train teachers. Costa Rica can and shall be a model for other nations in this matter. ", said Tanya Chapuisat.

The expert consultation is held in the framework of the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the ratification by Costa Rica of the Third Optional Protocol to the CRC on a Communications Procedure; and takes place in San José, at the Children's Museum, on 9 and 10 June.

Costa Rica became the tenth nation to ratify the third Optional Protocol to the CRC that allows children and teenagers to submit individual complaints concerning the violation of their rights to the Committee on the Rights of the Child of the United Nations.

In Costa Rica, violence against children takes place in various settings; children and adolescents are victims of abuse within the home, but also in education settings by peers and educators. Bullying, for example, has grown exponentially in recent years worldwide and Costa Rica is no exception. In the country, 25% of children say they have been assaulted, ridiculed and humiliated in their schools, while more than 15% claimed to have been victims of thefts, robberies, fights and beatings. Meanwhile, the reported number of cases of teacher-violence doubled from 2004 to 2011 reaching 2000 cases.

"We need to raise the Costa Rican society awareness about the pervasiveness of violence and the measures that can be taken to eradicate it", said SRSO Santos Pais, one of the organizers of the International Consultation.

SRSO Santos Pais also highlighted that the eradication of these cases will be achieved through investment in prevention and especially on education.

"We need to help parents to promote a positive and nurturing environment at home. Only through education and awareness societies will be able to lower the high levels of violence against children," stressed the SRSO adding that violence is a cycle that often takes place in various settings of a child's life.

"Worldwide millions of children and adolescents suffer violence, exploitation and abuse on a daily basis. Ignored by statistics and often forgotten in public policy, children become silent victims, suffering far away from public debate. The promotion and effective implementation of the Convention and its Protocols provide the basis for the protection of children from violence in their daily lives and through the use of new technologies. The commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Convention in Costa Rica is a call to strengthen our action to accelerate progress in safeguarding the rights of children", concluded Marta Santos Pais.

What is the Third Optional Protocol?

The "Third Optional Protocol to the CRC on a Communications Procedure" (known as PF3 CDN for its acronym in Spanish), allows children and teenagers to complain to the Committee on the Rights of Child of the United Nations on violations of their rights.

This protocol was approved by the United Nations General Assembly, in December 2011, and has been signed by 45 countries and ratified by 11. To enter into force, the Protocol needed to be ratified by 10 states and Costa Rica has been the country that has guaranteed its entry into force.

This legislation complements the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other optional protocols: the Optional Protocol that prohibits participation, recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. Since its entry into force in 2002, this protocol has been ratified by 156 countries.

The Second Optional Protocol requires the criminalization of the sale of children, sexual exploitation and child pornography, and protects children from these severe violations of their rights. This Protocol is closer to universal ratification; 167 States have ratified it and 26 states are about to ratify it.