



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

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International expert consultation

***Strengthening Communities to Secure Children's Right to Freedom
from Violence***

Opening session

Klækken, Norway

3 - 4 September 2015

Distinguished participants,

Dear colleagues and friends,

I would like to wish you a warm welcome and thank you all for joining us in this very important expert consultation on ***Strengthening Communities to Secure Children's Right to Freedom from Violence***.

Allow me to start by extending my gratitude to the Norwegian Minister for Children, Equality and Social Inclusion Solveig Horne for her support and for opening this consultation, and the Governments of Indonesia and Zambia for their strong commitment and partnership in advancing children's protection from violence.

I would also like to thank the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for sponsoring this consultation and Plan International for taking a leading role in organizing this meeting and developing the ***Global Guidance on Good Practice for Supporting Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms***, which will be presented later today.

Our consultation comes at a very opportune moment in time. In August this year, the Member States of the United Nations agreed on the final text of the post-15 agenda ***Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development***, which is expected to be adopted at the UN Summit, later this month (September).

The vision in the 2030 Agenda of "a world free of fear and violence", and the significant new goals and targets towards ending all forms of violence against children will require increased investment and commitment from all sectors of society, including at community level.

As part of the contribution to this new agenda, I was inspired by children's views through consultations with more than eight hundred thousand girls and boys.

Their message was clear and unambiguous: “violence is a major obstacle to child development and it urgently needs to be brought to an end!”

Children highlighted three major issues. **Firstly**, they expressed deep concern at the high levels of violence affecting their lives — in schools, the community, the workplace and the home. Girls underscored the particularly high risk of sexual violence, and boys the special risk of severe forms of physical abuse, crime-related violence and homicide. Children called for their effective protection from violence in all contexts and at all times. They ranked protection from violence as their second highest priority, immediately after education.

Secondly, children acknowledged that some manifestations of violence have heightened incidence in different regions of the world, where some groups of children are at special risk of violence. **The third message** strongly conveyed by children was that violence constitutes not only a crucial priority that the post-2015 development agenda should specifically address, but also a cross-cutting concern of crucial relevance for a wide range of development goals and targets, including when gender empowerment is pursued, quality education is promoted, safe public spaces are designed, and child labour is prevented. It is clear that children are eager to have a voice and have much to contribute to this important process.

Therefore, I am particularly pleased that the integration of children's participation and involvement in decision-making in community based child protection mechanisms is one of the key issues to be discussed over the next two days.

Dear Friends,

Since my mandate was established in 2009, my office has co-organized nine international expert consultations on various dimensions of children’s protection from violence. The latest one on ***Children’s Right to Protection from Armed Violence in the Community*** was recently held in Tegucigalpa, in cooperation with UNICEF and the Government of Honduras.

The Consultation reaffirmed the crucial value of human rights standards to secure children's right to freedom from violence and to guide State's laws, policies, budgets and actions to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against children, and to protect children from the serious impact of armed violence in the community.

Participants urged States and all actors in society to consolidate accountability and leadership for children's rights at the central and local levels, and to translate it into concrete action with tangible impact in children's homes, in their schools and in their communities. Building inclusive and peaceful spaces for children, everywhere and at all times, is an imperative for all nations and a crucial investment to enable children to develop to their full potential, and to achieve peaceful and cohesive societies and sustainable development for all.

As the consultation highlighted, through steady action guided by human rights, mobilizing secure funding and support from all actors, and coordinating effectively among sectors and institutions, communities can build and preserve safe spaces, develop early warning systems, and help to transform violent contexts into inclusive, caring and safe environments for children and their families.

Dear Friends,

We are gathered here in Norway for the 10th expert consultation and as we approach the 10th anniversary of the UN Study on Violence against Children, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006. We will benefit from the outcomes of previous meetings and discuss a critical area that will help to transform the ideals and recommendations of the Study into a tangible reality for children.

The UN Study helped to raise awareness and increase governments' commitment to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children. It promoted the establishment of a robust national child protection system in every country, supported by well-coordinated and resourced services and institutions, and a wide social mobilization process that would help to address the multidimensional nature of violence through a holistic approach.

The Study emphasized the importance of working at all levels to protect children in different settings, including in families, in schools, in communities, in institutions and in places where children work. Effective mechanisms to secure children's protection at all these levels and settings are critical components of this effort.

The Global Progress Survey on Violence against Children launched by my office in 2013 recognizes that important progress has been achieved around the world. However, there is still a persisting gap between human rights standards and the practical reality for children across regions. Progress has been too slow, too uneven and too fragmented to bring violence to an end. Most girls and boys who are exposed to violence still live in isolation, loneliness, and fear. Many children simply do not know where to turn for help, especially when the perpetrator is a family member, caregiver, teacher or anyone else responsible for their protection and well-being.

As the Global Study highlighted and recent studies, including by Plan International also reveal, national provisions are often inadequate to efficiently protect children and that implementation lags behind. Due to weak links between the national child protection system and measures put in place at community level, and limited capacity and resources of local authorities, the impact on the ground remains weak and uneven.

The Global Survey describes how the continuum between home, school and community that can become a conduit for positive change. When communities uphold values of solidarity, social inclusion, mutual respect and peaceful conflict resolution, children readily internalize these values. Similarly, when homes and schools are established as violence-free environments, there is a chance to reduce the incidence of violence in the community and beyond.

Child protection mechanisms in communities can take many forms. They can be a network or a group of individuals who work in a coordinated manner towards the protection of children from all forms of violence. They can derive from traditional or indigenous practices or be initiated and supported by external actors. They may be formal or informal. Although many forms and processes may shape their existence, it is essential that they are linked to the national child protection system.

Many of you here today are leading ambassadors to these important mechanisms and we look forward to learning about many good practices promoted by a wide range of actors and groups that shape this significant work at community level. We will also have a chance to explore how different actors and sectors cooperate and coordinate with each other.

Dear Friends,

The United Nations has been very sensitive to the crucial contribution made by community based institutions to the safeguard of human rights and the promotion of social development. The inclusion of a sustainable development goal on inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and urban spaces, and the hosting within a year of the third Habitat conference illustrate this well.

Another important example is the adoption by the UN General Assembly, a year ago, of the new Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the elimination of violence against children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

Framed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and several other human right treaties, international standards and norms, the Model Strategies have been prepared to help Member States to address the need for integrated strategies for violence prevention and child protection.

Reaffirming that violence against children is never justifiable and can always be prevented, the resolution stresses that it is the duty of States to protect children

from all forms of violence and human rights violations and to exercise due diligence to prohibit, prevent and investigate acts of violence against children, eliminate impunity and provide assistance to child victims, including prevention of revictimization.

The Model Strategies take into account the complementary roles of the child protection system, the formal and informal justice system, and the health and education sectors. They call for close interdisciplinary cooperation with the involvement of all relevant agencies, civil society groups, local and religious leaders and other relevant stakeholders, all of which have an indispensable role to play in creating a protective environment for children and preventing and responding to violence.

The Model Strategies also emphasize the need for parental capacity-building and family support as primary preventive measures, strengthening child protection concerns in school, public awareness-raising and community involvement in prevention policies and programmes. These are dimensions that our discussions will no doubt will also highlight.

Dear friends,

Guided by the rights of the child and the sound international human rights framework, this consultation seeks to enhance learning and provide further guidance on how to strengthen child protection mechanisms in the communities where children live and how to promote a multi-sectoral and coordinated approach between all relevant actors.

We will share and discuss good legislative, policy and program examples from communities and countries from different regions.

Over the next 2 days, through presentations and discussions in plenary and break-out groups, we will:

- Identify good practice of CBCPMs supported by various international, national and local actors in communities across different regions.

- Provide an overview of legal frameworks that support CBCPMs across different countries and regions and how to overcome tension in countries with plural legal systems

We will also discuss:

- Necessary linkages between CBCPMs and national child protection systems, including oversight mechanisms
- How to support effective participation of children in CBCPMs
- How to respect cultural sensitivities and ensure sustainability for CBCPMs, and lastly:
- The specific roles and responsibilities of different actors, including Governments, INGOs, local civil society organizations, community- and traditional leaders.

One of the main outcomes of this consultation will be a thematic report that captures the various contributions from all of you and provides guidance on how various stakeholders, including children, can effectively strengthen community mechanisms that secure children's right to freedom from violence.

I look forward to learning from your valuable experiences and fruitful discussions over these next two days and to building upon your important recommendations

Thank you!