



V Cross-Regional Meeting for Advancing the Protection of Children from Violence

Strasbourg, 18-19 June 2015

Conclusions and Recommendations

We, the participants in the V Cross-Regional Meeting 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 by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg (France); coming from the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Central-American Integration system (SICA), the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Council of Europe Secretariat, the League of Arab States, the Inter-American Children's Institute of the Organization of American States (IIN-OAS), the Latin-American and Caribbean Movement for Advancing the Protection of Children from Violence, as well as the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child of the African Union and the African Child Policy Forum;

Recognizing the critical role played by Regional Organizations and Institutions as catalysts of progress for 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;

Noting with appreciation the platform for dialogue and communication initiated and facilitated 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 effort to promote, in cooperation with regional organizations and institutions, the inclusion in the Post-2015 Global Sustainable Development Agenda of violence against children as a distinct and cross-cutting priority concern;

Gathered in Strasbourg during the year of the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, of the 5th anniversary of the entry into force of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (Lanzarote Convention), and of the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and reaffirming our strong commitment to 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 violence against children, with a particular focus on sexual violence;

Recognizing the opportunity to strengthen collaboration and accelerate progress in the prevention and elimination of violence against children with the current development in various regions of regional strategies on the rights of the child and children's protection;

Having examined the follow-up provided to the conclusions and recommendations of the IV Cross-Regional Round Table (Jamaica, 2014) and reaffirming our commitment to prevent and address violence in early childhood as a key concern in policy and legal frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, including through the mobilization of strong political engagement to end impunity and to prevent and reduce violence against young children; the promotion of policies and initiatives to support families and caregivers in their child-rearing responsibilities; the promotion of affordable, accessible and quality child-friendly services and child-sensitive support to young people through well-resourced institutions, services and well-trained staff; and the strengthening of strategic partnerships to raise the profile of early childhood initiatives in the public opinion.

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 and other international and regional child rights legal instruments;
- comprehensive national legislation to ban all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment within the family, and to strengthen children's legal protection from harmful practices, sexual abuse, exploitation and online risks;
- national multi-sectoral integrated strategies to prevent and address violence against children, at times as a core component of the national development plan;
- comprehensive national surveys conducted in different regions to assess the prevalence and severity of children's exposure to physical, emotional and sexual violence;
- 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 child 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;

2. Reaffirm our determination to further promote individual and joint initiatives 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 impact amongst vulnerable children, such as children with disabilities, children with albinism, those living on the street or in extreme poverty, those impacted by the financial crisis, those affected by migration, who are seeking asylum or who are refugees, those affected by armed conflict, gang and community violence, political instability, 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 pervasiveness and severity of sexual violence against children, its long-lasting impact on child victims and high cost for society and, recognizing that this phenomenon is surrounded by stigma, and remains hidden, concealed and unreported; further recognizing the urgency of establishing safe, accessible and child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaint mechanisms for children as a core component of national child protection systems and indispensable tools to prevent and respond to incidents of sexual violence; acknowledging the role new information and communication technologies play in empowering children and reducing risks of online abuse;

4. Agree to strengthen our cooperation to ensure the protection of children from all forms of sexual violence against children and to fight impunity for this serious child rights violation, including when associated with the use of information and communication technologies, by:

- **promoting the ratification and implementation** of relevant international and regional standards, including the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and on a Communications Procedure, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the Council of Europe Conventions on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse and on Cybercrime;
- **further strengthening national legislation to clearly prohibit** all forms of sexual violence including sexual abuse and exploitation of children in all settings, including when associated with the use of information and communication technologies; to secure the **protection of child victims**, both girls and boys, and their access to effective remedies and participation in child-friendly proceedings, as well as to reparation and recovery and reintegration services; to establish mandatory reporting responsibilities for professionals working with and for children and to ensure that candidates to these professions have not been convicted of acts of sexual exploitation or child sexual abuse; as well as to enable the **investigation and punishment** of those found responsible, whenever needed through cooperation across borders;
- **investing in prevention**, through awareness-raising, culturally sensitive information and education initiatives, including for children and families, and the **development and dissemination of child-friendly materials** to safeguard children's protection from sexual abuse and exploitation and consolidate a culture of respect for children's rights amongst children and the public at large;
- **developing and enhancing capacity-building activities for professionals** working with and for children, supported by clear guidance including on early detection and referral of incidents of abuse, ethical standards on counselling and interviews of children, and referral and mandatory reporting responsibilities;
- **supporting children's empowerment and their participation in initiatives** for safeguarding their rights, including freedom from sexual violence, **both online and offline**, tapping into children's resourcefulness and enhancing their resilience while exploring the potential of ICTs; guided by ethical standards, involving children in research and development of advocacy and policies to prevent and address their protection from sexual violence, as well as in evaluations to assess the effectiveness and impact of measures adopted;
- **establishing by law safe, accessible and child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaint mechanisms for children**, guided by the child's best interests and safeguarding the confidentiality of the proceedings and respect for children's right to privacy;
- **establishing effective oversight mechanisms** to ensure children's safety and protection, including in schools and out-of-school educational facilities, and care and justice institutions;
- **strengthening research** and data collection, analysis and use to inform policy-making, to overcome the invisibility of sexual violence and the lack of information on the magnitude and incidence of this phenomenon, on risk factors enhancing children's vulnerability such as social norms, attitudes and behaviour condoning sexual violence, as well as on effective strategies and good practices to prevent children's exposure to violence;

- **further enhancing strategic partnerships** to accelerate progress in this endeavour, including Member States, national institutions, Ombuds for children, civil society, academia, the media, the private sector, and faith-based organizations, and in particular by supporting the implementation of a safe, inclusive and empowering digital agenda for children and the promotion of a dedicated multi-stakeholder platform to balance children's empowerment and improved use of ICTs and their online safety and protection;

5. Further agree on the need to **support and mobilize support for the process of implementation of the Post-2015 sustainable development agenda**, particularly towards ending all forms of violence against children, including by strengthening implementation of comprehensive national strategies for violence prevention and elimination, consolidating and enforcing national legislation, ensuring universal birth registration of children, and enhancing data systems, with high-quality, timely and reliable disaggregated data to promote the follow-up and review of this agenda;

6. Express commitment to build upon the opportunities and momentum provided by the 10th anniversary of the UN Study on Violence against Children and the 20th anniversary of the Stockholm World Congress against the sexual exploitation of children to trigger urgent political action and public support to safeguard children's protection from violence; to collect and analyze data; 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 violence for all children at all times;

7. Agree to report back on the progress achieved in the 2016 Cross-Regional Round Table;

8. Reaffirm our commitment to continue to support the SRSG in her efforts to strengthen children's protection from violence and to put into practice the measures necessary to prevent it and address it as a matter of urgency;

9. Express gratitude to the Council of Europe for hosting the 2015 Cross-Regional Round Table on Violence against Children and for its crucial contribution to the meeting;

10. Welcome the invitation conveyed by the Council of the Baltic Sea States to host the 2016 Cross-Regional Meeting in Stockholm, Sweden.