

UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY GENERAL'S
STUDY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN
The Caribbean Regional Consultations
Trinidad 10-11 March 2005

DECLARATION OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUTH OF THE CARIBBEAN

We the youths and children of the Caribbean realize that we are by-products of our society and that given the proper encouragement and nourishment we have the potential to blossom into strong, beautiful and productive human beings – persons who can be true credits to their societies.

Violence is a harsh and daily reality for Caribbean youths, but it is not a reality which we will accept. Standing alone, either as a young person victimized by the proliferation of violence or as individual nations reeling from its pandemics, our voices are not heard; but, in standing together as a unified Caribbean, as a unified body of young people, our voices can be, must be, will be heard. In bringing to light the many issues of children facing violence, we realize that our plight is part of a larger worldwide struggle for the realization of human rights. Our cry is not to be treated specially but rather, humanely in accordance with the core values of human dignity that are the cornerstones of the United Nations Declaration. As global citizens we demand to be acknowledged as first- and not second-class human beings.

We accept that in order for change to occur we must first agree that there are solid grounds for change. We must then diligently work to see this transformation through. Within our society persists the phenomena of the “visibly invisible”; every day we are cognizant of the challenges which face

us: abuse, homelessness and exploitation of young people. Yet, society diverts their eyes and shuts its heart, feeling that intervening is inappropriate or that they are powerless to do so. Society can do better! Every day we are exploited and used as proxies for the deviance and perversion of adults whose real duty is to shelter and positively influence us.

Caribbean youths need mentorship, not dictatorship; education, not degradation; more encouragement, not more punishment.

In staking our claim we call on all members of society to join us as we strive to regain our world by enforcing the following recommendations.

VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

There should be an end to corporal punishment. Instead, the use of non-violent disciplinary measures should be encouraged.

Mentoring & teacher training programmes which include studies in psychology, communication skills and conflict resolution should be introduced into our schools as an ongoing process.

Young people should be educated about their rights and responsibilities so that they can understand the positive and negative implications of their behavior.

VIOLENCE IN INSTITUTIONS

The judicial system needs to be reformed so that we do not feel threatened and intimidated when reporting instances of abuse against us.

Legislation should be created and enforced to protect young people from adults who expose them to sexual or other exploitation.

VIOLENCE IN THE HOME & FAMILY

Parents and guardians must be educated in non-violent means of communicating with and disciplining their children.

Family-support institutions need to be revisited, revamped and restructured, ensuring that these institutions' core objectives meet the goals of more adequately equipping our parents to become better guardians and role models.

VIOLENCE IN WORK SITUATIONS

By propagating the rights of the child, society can confront traditional 'apprenticeship' practices and complacent attitudes towards child labour which deprive children of their right to education and play.

Inter-governmental organizations with responsibilities for children's and human rights should establish and enforce clearly defined international laws towards eliminating child labour, pressing national governments to enact these laws within their own countries.

VIOLENCE IN COMMUNITIES & STREETS

Young people should be provided with, as alternatives to the pull of violence and destructive forces within our communities, outlets that focus our minds and energies towards more positive and productive activities.

Investigation and research, with greater focus on utilizing the intimate knowledge of local peoples, should focus more on unearthing the hidden forms of child labour that result from illegal adoption, trafficking in persons, etc.

As youth leaders it is our responsibility to change the status quo, transforming the role of youth from that of victims to stewards of our peers, our brothers and our sisters. Indeed all stakeholders need to invest their energies and resources towards achieving this ideal.

Finally, we the young people of the Caribbean call on CARICOM, regional and governmental bodies to facilitate a follow up to this consultation which will ensure our that views and expectations are well represented.