

## CHERISH OUR CHILDREN – STOP VIOLENCE NOW

In conjunction with the UN Secretary-General's Report on Violence Against Children

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Welcome Speech By

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Yang Berbahagia Professor Datuk Dr. Mohd. Sham Kasim

Yang Berbahagia Dato Dr. Narimah Awin

Yang Berbahagia Datin Rose Ismail

Dr. Farah Nini Dusuki

Dr. Goh Chee Leong

Distinguished guests,

Members of the media

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a real pleasure for me to welcome you today to this Forum – **Cherish our Children, Stop Violence Now** – to mark the global launch of the UN Secretary-General's Report on Violence against Children. The Report is the result of a five year Study which is the first comprehensive, global study on all forms of violence against children. The study is also the first one by the United Nations that engages directly and consistently with children, underlining and reflecting their status as rights holders, and their right to express views on all matters that affect them and have their views given due weight.

Before we begin, I would like to thank our speakers – Professor Dato' Dr. Sham Kassim, Dato Dr. Narimah Awin, Dr. Farah Nini Dusuki and Dr. Goh Chee Leong for being with us this evening to share their experience and expertise on the various forms of violence children are forced to endure and the roles that each of us can play to stop this violence. I would also like to thank our moderator Datin Rose Ismail for her support of this Forum.

My gratitude also goes to the many experts and child protection practitioners from government and non-governmental organisations as well as members of the media for making time to be with us today to ensure a lively discussion which I hope will generate ideas and the inspiration to move forward to enhance the protective environment for children in Malaysia.

Ladies and gentleman,

## THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL'S STUDY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Five years ago, in 2001, on the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to conduct an in-depth study on the question of violence against children and to put forward recommendations for consideration by Member States.

In response, the Secretary-General appointed an independent expert, Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro to lead this Study. Violence was defined as that of article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse." It also draws on the definition in the *World Report on Violence and Health* (2002): "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a child, by an individual or group, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity."

On 11 October 2006, the UN Secretary-General launched his Report from the study. The study, which combined human rights, public health and child protection perspectives focussing on five 'settings' where violence occurs, namely the home and family, schools and educational settings, institutions (care and judicial), the workplace, and the community, reveals the startling picture that for many children, violence is routine and part of their daily picture:

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 40 million children below the age of 15 suffer from violence, abuse and neglect.
- WHO also estimates that some 53,000 children aged 0-17 died as a result of homicide in 2002;
- According to the International Labour Office's (ILO) latest estimates, 5.7 million children were in forced or bonded labour, 1.8 million in prostitution and pornography, and 1.2 million were victims of trafficking in 2000.
- In 16 developing countries reviewed by a Global School-Based Health Survey, the percentage of school-aged children that reported having been verbally or physically bullied at school ranged from 20 per cent in some countries to as much as 65 per cent in others;

- According to the Study, children in detention are frequently subjected to violence by staff, including as a form of control or punishment, often for minor infractions. In 77 countries, corporal and other violent punishments are accepted as legal disciplinary measures in penal institutions.

Additionally, the Report highlights the following findings:

- Much violence remains hidden or unreported, and figures therefore often underestimate the scope of the problem;
- Violence does not discriminate between rich and poor nations and pervades all societies within which children grow up. Sadly, violence is part of the economic, cultural and societal norms that make up many children's environment;
- Violence against children occurs in schools, orphanages, detention centres and other residential care facilities, on the streets, in the home as well in the relatively new context of the internet where children are both abused and exploited by the production of pornography, and risk being exposed to images of violence and degradation;
- Violence in all its forms has its roots in issues such as the power relations between men and women, exclusion, absence of a primary care giver and in societal norms and values that often disregard the rights of children; and,
- Other factors contributing towards the unacceptable prevalence of violence against children include drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment and youth disenfranchisement, crime, and a culture of silence and impunity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

## PROHIBITING ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE – RECOMMENDATIONS

The UN Report on Violence Against Children stresses the need to prohibit all forms of violence and the importance of a coordinated national approach to the problem, always respecting and promoting the participation of children. The challenge of ending violence against children requires a multidisciplinary approach combining strong responsive and preventive strategies which focus on the four "Ps": **P**rotection of children, **P**revention of violence, **P**rosecution of criminals and **P**articipation of children.

Efforts to prevent and respond to violence against children must be multi-faceted and adjusted according to the form of violence, its setting and the perpetrator or perpetrators. Whatever the action taken, the best interests of the child must always be the primary consideration.

The Report to the UN General Assembly has identified a number of key principles:

- No violence against children is justifiable. Children should never receive less protection than adults;
- All violence against children is preventable. States must invest in evidence-based policies and program to address factors that give rise to violence against children;
- States have the primary responsibility to uphold children’s rights to protection and access to services, and to support families’ capacity to provide children with care in a safe environment;
- States have the obligation to ensure accountability in every case of violence;
- The vulnerability of children to violence is linked to their age and evolving capacity. Some children, because of gender, race, ethnic origin, disability or social status are particularly vulnerable and deserve added attention;
- Children have the right to express their views and have them given due weight in the planning and implementation of policies and programs.

The Study has developed overarching and setting-specific recommendations, which are included in the Report. The recommendations are addressed primarily to Governments, referring to their legislative, administrative, judicial, policy-making, service delivery and institutional functions while some others are directed at the role of civil society organisations, the private sector and the media. For us to do right by our children, the Report recommends that the following must take place:

1. **National and local commitments are strengthened** and there are actions to tackle violence in all settings, to care and rehabilitate child victims, to raise awareness and build capacity; and to carry out research and data collection.
2. **All violence against children is prohibited** by sending a clear message across societies that any form of violence against children is unacceptable and unlawful while reinforcing positive, non-violent social norms at the same time. Prosecutions and formal interventions must take place to protect a child from significant harm and when judged to be in the best interests of the child. Strong and enforceable legal sanctions should be implemented to deter violence against children.
3. **Prevention must be prioritised** by developing a consistent legal and policy framework that prohibits all forms of violence; challenges social norms which condone violence, and enhances the capacity of all those who work with and for children and families to promote non-violence.

4. **The capacity of all who work with and for children must be consistently enhanced** through systematic and long-term support, in pre-service as well as in-service training at all levels to ensure highly functional staff and high-quality services for children.
5. **Recovery and social reintegration services must be provided** to help reduce the risk of child victims of violence continuing the cycle of violence.
6. **Children must be given a voice** as they can make a significant contribution to both describing the problem of violence against them, and also to the design of services and other interventions that they can trust and use.
7. **Child-friendly reporting systems and services must be accessible** to enable children to talk in confidence about anything that is worrying or hurting them. Making confidential services available to children, including those most vulnerable to violence, challenges outdated concepts of parental 'ownership' of their children. What we now know about intra-familial violence demands that children should have the same rights as adult family members to seek confidential advice and help.
8. **Programs must be accountable and impunity brought to an end.** Court processes must ensure that child witnesses are treated sensitively, that they are not subjected to extended court proceedings, and that their privacy is respected. The stress of court proceedings should be minimized with appropriate services. When parents or other family members are the perpetrators of violence, decisions concerning formal interventions and prosecutions must be made according to the best interests of the child. When the perpetrator is another child, the response should be focused on rehabilitation, while ensuring the protection of the affected child.
9. **The gender dimension of violence against children must be addressed** openly since girls and boys are at different risk for different forms of violence across different settings. All research into violence against children and into strategies to prevent and respond to it should be designed to take gender into account. In particular, the Study has found a need for men and boys to play active roles and exercise leadership in efforts to overcome violence.
10. **Systematic national data collection and research efforts must be developed and implemented** as these are critical for knowledge building and improved program development. Such plans should include children, parents, service providers and others, and use a range of methods such as interview studies, improved reporting and registration systems and investigation procedures, and regular surveys, with particular attention given to vulnerable groups of girls and boys.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

## UNICEF MALAYSIA – BUILDING A PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

The central message of this Report is that ***no violence against children is justifiable including those cloaked as “tradition” or disguised as “discipline”; and that all violence against children is preventable.***

There can be no compromise in challenging violence against children. Children’s uniqueness – their human potential, their initial fragility and vulnerability, their dependence on adults for their growth and development – make an unassailable case for more, not less, investment in prevention and protection from violence.

In Malaysia, UNICEF is working hand-in-hand with the Government, civil society, the private sector and the media to ensure a “protective environment” for all children free from violence, abuse and discrimination. We are focused on establishing an effective social and legal protection system through (1) advocacy for child protection rights; (2) technical assistance and capacity enhancement; (3) grassroots programs; (4) public information and dissemination; (5) applicable research and analysis. Our programs in Malaysia are designed to assist policy makers and partners:

- To initiate preventive measures against child abuse and neglect, sexual exploitation and trafficking of children, including awareness raising at local level, and education and training opportunities for children and young people at-risk;
- To develop and strengthen comprehensive monitoring and reporting systems for child abuse and sexual exploitation at national/state/district levels;
- To facilitate effective partnerships with Government, NGOs, faith based organisations, universities and research institutions, the media and the private sector to strengthen the protective environment for children in Malaysia;
- To design and test program models which if successful could be replicated nationwide; and
- To improve access to quality basic education and health services for children in marginalised communities

Activities under UNICEF Malaysia’s child protection programs include:

1. A **situational analysis of children** in Malaysia together with the Government that will include an assessment of the overall protective environment for children in Malaysia. The exercise, which will also include an assessment of the prevalence of marginalised and vulnerable children and children at risk, will form the basis of a report which will also include recommendations for programmatic and advocacy responses designed to mitigate those risks and to rehabilitate victims.

2. **Capacity building for social workers** in delivering protection services in the court process, a project organised under the leadership of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and in collaboration with the Malaysian Association for the Protection of Children, and the Royal Malaysian Police.
3. A **School Bullying Prevention Program and Youth Mentoring Program** in partnership with the HELP University College and the Ministry of Education to combat bullying behaviour among students and enhance the overall capacity of schools to efficiently cope with disciplinary behaviour amongst students.
4. **Research and advocacy to combat trafficking in children**, together with the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development; and the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM).
5. **Comprehensive health care services for children with special needs** in collaboration with the Ministry of Health's Family Health Development Division to provide comprehensive health care services for children with special needs from infancy to school going age. The program specifically responds to the sexual and reproductive issues for children with special needs in recognition their risk to sexual exploitation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

## MOVING FORWARD – OUR ROLE TO END VIOLENCE

While leadership is crucial to the process of fighting violence and building a protective environment for children, we all share in the responsibility to put an end to violence.

This evening, I believe we have moved another step forward. I am filled with gratitude to have all of you with us this evening – from Government, civil society, religious organisations, the private sector, and media. I thank you for your presence and your courage to grasp hold of the issues raised tonight and for your commitment towards realising the rights of children.

If we can all work together to ensure that every single child who needs to be in school is in school; to ensure that laws are in place to punish those who exploit or harm children, to ensure that communities are aware of the risks which children face, to ensure that civil society addresses certain 'taboo' issues, and to ensure that monitoring is in place to identify children who are at risk; we are on the right direction to keeping our promises to children.

We are all here today because we strongly believe that the protection of children is at the centre of our efforts for a better world. Children are to be cherished. Let us say No to violence.

Thank you.