

## REGIONAL THEMATIC PREPARATORY MEETING FOR 5<sup>TH</sup> WORLD SUMMIT ON MEDIA FOR CHILDREN

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### REMARKS BY

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The central importance of mass media in shaping the lives of children and young people are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international treaty created to protect the basic rights of children and young people. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by 191 countries, establishes some of the following rights for children:

- A child's right to a free flow of information and ideas;
- A child's right to information material specifically tailored to their age, interests and linguistic needs;
- A child's right to protection from information that may be harmful to their wellbeing; and,
- A child's right to freedom of expression, including the right to express their views on matters affecting them.

The 1999 Oslo Challenge, issued on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a call to governments, organisations and individuals to build constructive relationships between children and the media. The Challenge was at the end of a meeting of young people, media professionals and child rights experts organised by UNICEF and the Government of Norway.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

### 1. THE POWER OF MEDIA – RESPONSIBLE REPORTING

Media professionals are champions of human rights. The media acts as the eyes, ears and voices of the public, drawing attention to abuses of power and human rights, often at great personal risk.

Through your media platforms, you frequently expose the plight of children abused or exploited by adults or caught up in circumstances beyond their control. Your work influences policy and encourage governments and civil society organisations to effect changes that will improve the quality of people's lives and ensure the best for children.

However, in your efforts to uncover cases of abuse against children, you have the potential to exploit and abuse them a second time. Sexually provocative images of children in news reporting, documentaries and advertising, while well-intentioned, could inadvertently serve as a vehicle for child pornography, or a source of information for paedophile networks.

To truly protect children, the media must practice responsible journalism which reports the experience of childhood accurately, while reflecting respect for the rights of the child.

Sensationalism will capture the attention of its audience but such coverage may also contribute to myths that damage public perception of children. It is a fine line between sensitive, intelligent reporting and sensationalizing the issue. The focus should always be on educating and informing the public, and monitoring child rights standards.

In exposing and highlighting abuse and in bringing these abuses to the attention of the public, we do children an injustice when we represent them as “victims”, “innocents” or “villains”. Not only does this perpetuate society’s misconception on the capability of children, it also increases children’s vulnerability.

Reporting in such cases should go beyond identifying a problem. It should include interviews, including with children, where and when appropriate, that illustrate the cause of the problem. Such stories will report consequences and describe the issue from a variety of points of view, presenting the situation in an entirely new framework. Such an approach is more likely to influence public policy, by informing policy makers and those in a position to take action. In such cases, the media reaches a degree of excellence that can have a profound effect on its audience, and create a real climate for change.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

## 2. DIGITAL MEDIA AGE & CHILDREN

I come to my next point - the digital media age. The multimedia environment is changing rapidly, driven by user demands. Televisions are more and more interactive; computers and mobile phones are provide broadcasting content, including TV programs; SMS is used to communicate via TV, including for competition participation. Simply put, information is being delivered like never before. And the main users appear to be children and young people.

Unlike their parents who sit in the living room merely watching network programming, children are adapting and interacting with a media landscape that includes cable channels, camcorders, satellite dishes, computers, modems and mobile phones. Interactive technology is clearly revolutionizing the way in which children are watching television. And because children are more adventurous, less risk averse than adults, they have the ability to embrace technology and all its complexities. In terms of creating content, as an audience and participant, children and young people make up for one of the most exciting and challenging market segments.

For the first time, we are in a world, where children, are way ahead of adults in the ways they consume content. The convergence of platforms - mobile and fixed; increasingly sophisticated interactivity; and the on-demand content world, allow children to skip easily across a multiplatform environment searching for distinctive, relevant and related content. This transformation in the consumption of content makes it essential for broadcasters to listen to children to ensure opportunities are grasped creatively and quickly. And we adults, need to embrace the new and multimedia world with an enthusiasm that matches that of children.

A whole new way of thinking about, and executing credible content and delivery is required. A unique cross-platform style of programming is needed. One that is exciting to children; one that will captivate their attention and sustain their interest; and most importantly, one that will ensure protection of their privacy and well-being. Protecting children from the harmful side effects of this new interactive technology is critical to avoid manipulation and exploitation, as we currently see with internet technology. As television transitions from analog to digital, how will children be affected by interactive marketing campaigns?

If self regulation fails, appropriate tools, guidelines and regulatory frameworks will be put in place to guarantee that content is delivered in a way that has children's best interest at heart. Children deserve excellence as well as innovation in regards to content. Children have a right to a service that provides content that goes beyond 'informative, educational and entertaining', to also be relevant and nourishing.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

## **MOVING FORWARD**

In a world that is cluttered and full of distractions, TV, radio and the new age digital media can be meaningful, positive experiences for children and young people. It's challenging. It's also about responsibility – to all play our part to ensure that our youngest citizens are protected, physically, intellectually and emotionally.

To keep our promise to children,

1. Broadcasters should produce news and documentaries that detail the needs and challenges of children, while always ensuring that they have the best interest of the child at heart. There is much that has been done to help guide media reporting for and with children. Amongst others these include the International Federation of Journalists Guidelines for the Media titled “Putting Children in the Right” as well as UNICEF’s Guidelines on Reporting on Children and Young People under 18 Years Old. A copy of the UNICEF Guidelines is available for today’s Meeting.
2. Broadcasters should engage children’s intellect and stimulate their imagination. You must create child appropriate, non-exploitative content - delivered in a safe environment. You have the tools and the platforms to open children's minds to new worlds. You should use these to help them achieve their goals in their own good time.
3. Broadcasters should be respectful of children's culture and understand its distinctive exuberant character, its needs, its limitations, what it can offer us and its value to children. You must understand the difference between shaping this culture and reflecting it.
4. Broadcasters should understand and respect that, at times, the adult world can be a very challenging or even frightening place for children. You need to tread carefully in helping them to understand this world.
5. Broadcasters need to invest in research to understand how digital media is having an impact on children’s lives. Access to such information will enable you to work with governments to formulate media policies and regulatory frameworks that are grounded in a solid knowledge base while enabling you to develop content that will facilitate the healthy growth of children.

As we move forward into the dazzling digital age, we must not forget these invaluable promises to our children. In this, we must be proactive, rather than reactive.

Thank you. I wish you a successful meeting.

Thank you.