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Voices of Youth
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Young people speak out against violence in schools

Children's participation in the International Colloquium "Towards a School of Dialogue and Respect" Tunis 14-16 April 2005

In order to ensure children's participation to the International Colloquium "Towards a School of Dialogue and Respect" in Tunis, 14-16 April 2005, *Voices of Youth* (www.unicef.org/voy/) in collaboration with UNICEF Tunisia organized a 2-hour-long live chat.

A few days before the Colloquium, on the 11th of April, four countries that participated in the "Stop violence, start in school" Middle East and North Africa regional project (Palestine, Morocco, Yemen and Tunisia) were involved in a live chat on violence in schools. In order to ensure good conditions for the organization of the chat and to meet the close deadline, participation was limited to two students per country, who participated from the UNICEF offices in their respective countries. The two Tunisian students involved in the session also participated in a panel discussion scheduled on the last day of the Colloquium. Their speeches drew on their own experience and on key elements from the chat session.

Talking points for the chat session

- 1) Do you feel comfortable going to school and do you think that school provides you with a safe and friendly environment?
- 2) Have you personally experienced violence in school or have any of your friends, classmates or relatives experienced violence in school?
- 3) What is school violence for you?
- 4) What do you think are the main causes leading to violent attitudes or behavior on the part of adults or students in school?
- 5) What impact does school violence have on your study and motivation?
- 6) What impact does school violence have on school life (teachers, students, school atmosphere and environment)?
- 7) How is violence dealt with by your school? What do you think are the two most efficient measures taken by the school to cope with the problem? Why do you think these measures are efficient and work?
- 8) What about parents?
- 9) Do you think that students participate and their voices are heard when the school responds and takes decisions concerning violent attitudes and behavior?

Highlights from the chat session

The 10 young people who participated in the chat unanimously call for safe schools that are conducive to learning, and look to teachers, administrators and their peers to ensure a secure learning environment for all children. Following are some highlights of young people's perceptions pertaining to problems and causes as well as possible solutions to school violence.

Problems and/or causes of school violence

- Many participants mentioned corporal and moral punishment, such as insults inflicted by teachers, as a means of enforcing order in the classroom
- Girls felt that they were more exposed to violence than boys, particularly moral and verbal violence
- Underprivileged socio-economic conditions of families do have an impact on possible violent acts and aggressive behavior
- When children live in a violent surrounding such as wars, this can only have a negative impact on schools
- The students showed skepticism concerning the school administration's efficiency in responding to school violence, as the administration always tends to be on the part of the school personnel
- Even when laws/rules exist against violence within schools, these are not properly enforced
- There is a tendency on the part of the school to downplay violent acts and school violence as an issue, even when children would be willing to talk about it
- There is a difference between public and private schools: where a tuition fee is paid by parents, school administrations are be much more cautious of violent acts against children

Proposed solutions

- Punishment is not a solution to school violence and some teachers do use this power extensively
- A system should be put in place to have teachers punished for violent acts against children, and solutions should also be found to prevent violent acts among students
- A participatory committee in charge of controlling school violence could be created within each school
- Trained psychologists or teachers could help better respond to violent acts
- Discussion forums could be created on school violence among students and with teachers, possibly in informal settings such as lunches
- Parent associations could also be created and could contribute in providing solutions
- The creation of clubs (painting, music, etc.) could transform violence into creativity
- In order to ensure safety in the school, guns and other weapons should be prohibited by schools and parents, and rules against violence and gangs should be enforced
- The school environment should be improved by ensuring that the school is not placed next to dangerous sites such as rivers or forests where gangs could be hidden
- Media campaigns should be held on the issue
- In countries where a child parliament exists, the issue of school violence could be addressed through children at the highest political level
- Some countries would benefit by recognizing children rights as a first step, without which it is useless to talk about school violence

Since 1995, VOY has focused on exploring the educational and community building potential of the Internet, and facilitating the active and substantive participation of young people on child rights and development related issues. Through web boards, interactive quizzes, youth leadership profiles, live chats and more, Voices of Youth provides thousands of young people from over 180 countries with an opportunity to self-inform, engage in lively debate, and partner—with their peers and decision makers—to create a world fit for children.