

Summary of children's forum

Under the aegis of ECPAT, Plan International, Save the Children Sweden and World Vision twenty two (22) children representatives from Central, East, Southern and West Africa met together on the 22nd and 23rd of September 2008 in Dakar for a preparatory session to the African technical meeting. These children were chosen by their peers during national consultations held in their countries

After a review of the situation of sexual exploitation and sexual violence against children in their respective countries and based on the themes of the technical meeting, children were able to give their inputs to the thematic discussions and the following observations and recommendations were made:

1. Sexual violence is becoming widespread in families, at school and in institutions as well as on the streets. Incest, paedophilia and child prostitution are taking on worrying proportions in the face of general indifference,
2. Some categories of children such as girls, handicapped children, children affected by HIV AIDS are subject to discrimination and exclusion, which makes them even more vulnerable
3. Some religious and traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), early marriage, placement to repay debt, exploitation of children by the worst forms of work which constitute serious violations of the rights of the child are becoming more and more widespread,
4. The consequences of violence are serious and dramatic for children. They range from trauma to loss of human life and also include injuries, physical handicap, psychological after-effects, with reproduction of violence by the child victims, dropping out and failing at school, family and social break down, juvenile delinquency, health problems and even suicide.

This violence against children is therefore prejudicial to their health, their development, their growth and their well being.

After analysing the different themes, exchanging experiences, discussions as well as working in groups and plenary sessions, the children delegates drew the following conclusions and recommendations:

For the governments:

- Draft and apply laws that tackle violence against children punish the perpetrators and witnesses who keep silent and increase the sentences
- Promote good governance to avoid corruption and impunity and peace initiatives to avoid civil war and political conflict
- Promote literacy classes for parents and access to education for all children
- Create and promote access to health and psychosocial support and counselling centres for children victim of sexual exploitation
- Support children's' organisations in their initiatives to fight against sexual exploitation of children

For NGO, UN Agencies and civil society:

- Raise awareness of the population on the consequences of sexual exploitation of children and break the culture of silence
- Advocate for the establishment of efficient and decentralise national child protection systems
- Support children's' organisations in their initiatives to fight against sexual exploitation of children
- Support counselling and psychosocial centres for children victim of sexual exploitation

For families and communities:

- Create and promote intergenerational dialog between children and their parents of all matters concerning them including sexual education
- Occupy children's free time with healthy activities and participate to schools activities to know what is going on your children's schools
- Parents should accompany their children to school and safeguard their protection and create dialog with teachers
- Parents and communities should not send their children to work fro their own benefit.

For children

- Denounce the perpetrators, refuse all suspicious propositions and behave responsibly
- Initiate awareness raising campaigns of their peers and parents on the consequences of sexual violence.
- Initiative mutual support activities including helping friend to denounce the perpetrators and to get in dialog with their parents.
- Advocate their governments to punish the perpetrators and witnesses who keep silent and to increase the sentences