



MEETING STATEMENT

180 delegates representing 33 African countries, including Government, civil society, children and adolescents; and representing the African Union; humanitarian aid agencies; and the private sector gathered in Dakar Senegal on 24-25 September, 2008 for the African Preparatory Meeting for the World Congress III against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents.

The overall objectives of the meeting were to review progress made during the past five years and to identify key challenges that remain in Africa towards prevention and response to sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. Specific objectives included to:

- exchange effective approaches to combating sexual exploitation of children in Africa;
- increase the knowledge and evidence on forms and causes of sexual exploitation and abuse of children;
- discuss mechanisms to identify, document, and share effective inter-sectoral approaches – including in conflict and post-conflict situations; and
- support the active participation of a key number of African children and young people in preparations for the World Congress III.

22 child representatives from Central, East, Southern and West Africa met on 22-23 September 2008 in Dakar to prepare for participation in the Preparatory Meeting. The children, selected by their peers during national consultations, reviewed the situation of sexual exploitation of children based on the themes of the technical meeting and agreed on a list of actions and recommendations to be carried out by children themselves to fight against sexual exploitation in their countries. They then participated in the adults meeting sessions and led one on “Strengthening children's ability to protect themselves from sexual exploitation and abuse”. Most of their recommendations were integrated in the overall Meeting recommendations.

It was recognised that **significant progress** had been made since the 2001 Yokohama Second World Congress in the majority of African countries in specific areas including:

- Increased awareness of the existence of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents;
- Revision and reform of legislation to better protect children in line with continental and international standards;
- Development of some good practices for response to child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation across the continent; and

- Piloting of good models for prevention and early intervention that could be scaled up.

However, it was also noted that **major challenges** remain to eliminate sexual exploitation of children, to ensure adequate response to child victims, and to address emerging trends that account for increasingly complex forms of sexual exploitation of children. For example:

- While legal frameworks have been strengthened, access to justice for child victims remains limited;
- Law enforcement mechanisms are weak and often not child friendly;
- Poverty reduction has not been significant and many children are vulnerable to or forced into sexual exploitation due to their own survival needs and those of their families;
- Child protection systems of both government and civil society are often weak and have not yet been taken to scale leaving many children without access to services;
- Coordination of activities or interventions remains challenging;
- Resources, both financial and human, remain extremely limited for child protection related services;
- There is a serious lack of evidence on sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in Africa which significantly impacts on the planning, monitoring and budgeting processes;
- More attention is needed to address the linkage between sexual exploitation of children and HIV and AIDS; namely the vulnerability of children orphaned by AIDS to being sexually exploited and the vulnerability of children involved in sexual exploitation to contracting HIV; and
- Sexual exploitation of children is a constantly evolving phenomenon, with new manifestations that require evidence gathering and interventions, such as on:
 - the growing use of information and communications technologies in Africa that pose certain risks to children of sexual exploitation; and
 - the significant increase in tourism to the continent that unfortunately entails a greater risk to child sex tourism and the production of child pornography.

Many of the challenges identified clearly reflect key issues addressed in the recommendations of the UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children, one of the key background documents for the Meeting. Recommendations highlighted in thematic sessions, included the call - for legal reforms and implementation of laws to stop violence against children; to prioritize prevention; to promote non-violent values; to provide recovery and social reintegration services; to address the gender dimension of violence against children; to ensure participation of children; and to develop and implement systematic national data collection and research.

It was also recognised that the AU Call for Accelerated Action on Implementation of an African Fit for Children (2008-2012) provides a framework for addressing the issue of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in Africa. Overall, it calls for actions related to strengthening the legislative and policy framework; the institutional

framework; and mobilising and leveraging resources. More specifically, in relation to enhanced protection for children, it calls for all Member States to:

- a) promote and implement integrated national strategies comprising zero-tolerance, backed by appropriate amendment to criminal codes and relevant legislation enforcement and raising awareness to abandon harmful traditional practices such as female genital cutting/mutilation and early marriage; and
- b) promote and implement multi-sectoral programmes on ending violence against children, including neglect, abuse, sexual exploitation, child labour and trafficking guided by the findings and recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children as well as support activities such as lifelines and safe havens to rehabilitate and reintegrate children victims of abuse, sexual exploitation, rape and trafficking.

Participants agreed in principle to 30 **proposed recommendations for action** that address specific issues related to improving prevention and response to sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in Africa. These were generated through discussions in eight thematic workshops focused on four key thematic areas, 1) Forms and underlying causes; 2) Legal frameworks and enforcement; 3) Inter-sectoral cooperation; and 4) Corporate Social Responsibility

Across the recommendations derived from the thematic workshops, emphasis was placed on the need for

- documentation and sharing of good practices;
- more attention to the development of evidence through research and evaluations,
- the establishment of Management Information Systems (MIS);
- strengthening capacity building of service providers; and
- increased allocation of resources.

In summary, additional recommendations from the 4 key themes are:

Theme 1: Forms and underlying causes of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents:

Social Norms: Strengthen and adapt innovative approaches for the promotion of social norms and traditional practices with positive impact on the protection of children; and the integration of traditional practices within institutional systems.

Economic Factors: Promote that “national social protection strategies” are child and gender sensitive, targeting the most vulnerable children and their families, and adequately resourced.

Theme 2: Law enforcement and legal frameworks

Legal frameworks: Ratification of key global and regional conventions related to sexual exploitation of children and domestication of the ACRWC and CRC by all AU member states by 2010, as per the commitment in the AU Call for Accelerated Action on Africa Fit for Children.

Law enforcement: Strengthen enforcement of the law through addressing key barriers including the importance of child friendly procedures and response systems for child victims of sexual exploitation; birth registration; legal education; and adequate resource allocation.

Theme 3: Inter-sectoral cooperation:

Sexual exploitation in and around the schools in Africa: Establish mechanisms for reporting, follow-up, and monitoring cases of sexual abuse of children in and around schools, especially girls, to ensure a safe and child friendly environment; and promote and support active involvement/ collaboration of school governing structures; teacher's unions; parent associations; and student councils.

Sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations: Strengthen coordination of humanitarian response in relation to gender-based violence using the cluster approach, government leadership, and mapping of interventions; and Strengthen quality and coverage of data, disaggregated by gender and age, on sexual violence in conflict and post conflict situations (using monitoring mechanisms, such as Security Council 1612).

Services for prevention and response, including community child protection systems: Undertake national mapping exercises of inter-sectoral services for prevention and response to sexual exploitation of children and adolescents at all levels; and conduct capacity gap analysis and costing.

Strengthen children's ability to protect themselves from sexual exploitation and abuse: Advocate to integrate sex education, particularly on child sexual exploitation, in the school curriculum; encourage the involvement of traditional leaders in fighting the sexual exploitation of children; and allocate air time in the media so that children can organise and participate in radio and TV programmes.

Theme 4: Corporate social responsibility

Private Sector support: Create a private sector alliance and "fund" that is managed by the private sector for Corporate Social Responsibility activities that build on lessons learnt.

Protection mechanisms: Strengthen links between media and the information industry with youth work to promote awareness on safe internet use, and parental control mechanisms.

In conclusion it was suggested that monitoring and tracking progress could be incorporated into some of the mechanisms noted in the AU Call for Accelerated Action on Implementation of an African Fit for Children (2008-2012). These include the submission of biennial progress reports on status of implementation of the Plan of Action to the AU Organs through the African Union Commission and to include a review in the African Peer Review Mechanism, as well as, in country missions of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.