



EL SALVADOR, 1996, A group of children in a refugee camp in El Salvador

“Violence against children is never justified in any setting or context. States should be in a position to offer appropriate support to parents, teachers, criminal justice personnel and others who sometimes resort to violence against children. We all have a responsibility to act to eliminate it.”

Mehr Khan Williams, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights



THE WAY FORWARD

The evidence collected for the United Nations Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children, in line with the clear consensus of its participants, suggests that, although violence against children is widespread, it is preventable, and the world has the resources to effect its elimination. Experts, practitioners, and children themselves agree that violence is not an unchanging, inevitable feature of life, and must not be passively accepted as such. Moreover, the Study has documented the progress made by Governments as they begin to acknowledge the scale of the problem and respond to the human rights obligations they have accepted.

Governments and a wide range of partners have come forward with useful and concrete actions to prevent violence against children, reduce its multiple impacts, and advocate for change. A growing number of action research projects, prevention strategies and therapeutic responses are being implemented and evaluated; this is providing an increasingly solid evidence base for partners to adapt and improve existing interventions, and create new ones. As well as specifically protecting the youngest and most vulnerable members of society from violence, these actions contribute to the wider objective of reducing violence for all, as it is clear that interventions focusing on the young have the greatest potential to reap benefits in society as a whole.

Throughout the Study process, and as ever-greater numbers of participants had their say, a number of issues were raised repeatedly in region after region. First and foremost was the alarming gap between States’ obligations and

commitments on the one hand, and the reality of children’s lives on the other. As the Study report presented to the UN General Assembly notes, “Member States have already made commitments to protect children from all forms of violence. However, we must accept – from children’s testimony during the Study process, as well as from the results of research – that these commitments are far from being fulfilled.”¹

Much of this state of affairs stems from a lack of leadership by politicians and other decision-makers. Discussion of the problem has too often remained muted and vague, allowing the threshold of acceptable action to stay at a low level, and the linkages between different forms of violence to be overlooked. For the most part, prohibiting and eliminating violence against children lacks adequate political attention. To become a high priority, the elimination of violence against children requires strong political leadership and determined advocacy by civil society.

Strong mechanisms must be put in place at national, regional and international levels to ensure implementation of the Study’s recommendations. Leadership and coordination are equally important at international, regional and national levels. The implementation of most of the recommendations presented in the Introduction to this report depends on the capability of Governments to incorporate all recommendations within current legal instruments and public policies, in a coordinated way. The continuous commitment of human and financial resources to a broad and systematic framework to reduce and respond to vio-

“Too often, we see that legislation is on the books but that many children remain on the margins of society – not registered at birth, not in school, too poor to see a doctor and, for that, all the more vulnerable to violence and abuse.”

Rima Salah, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF

lence against children, integrated into national planning processes, is essential for the success of this endeavour. Stopping violence against children requires not only sanctioning perpetrators, but also transformation of the “mind-set” of societies and the underlying economic and social conditions that allow violence against children to thrive.

Strong regional support for the implementation of the recommendations is also important. Regional mechanisms can play a significant role in bridging gaps in technical expertise, sharing best practices and assessing progress. Regional networks established during the Study process have continued in various forms in each of the regions. For example, in the Middle East and North Africa, an expanded regional network which includes Government representatives and the Arab League is taking action to implement the Study recommendations related to a range of regional priorities.² The South Asia Forum, established in 2005 as a result of the Regional Consultation hosted by the Government of Pakistan, has begun to implement the Study recommendations with a focus on the issues of early marriage, and physical and psychological punishment. In addition, the Council of Europe has launched a three-year programme, “Building a Europe for and with Children.” This programme takes into account the various dimensions of violence against children in two closely linked strands: the promotion of children’s rights, and the action programme “Children and Violence.”³ In the strand focused on promoting children’s rights, the programme will help European States to set up integrated children’s

policies and comprehensive legal frameworks. The action programme against violence supports States in their obligations to ensure the protection of children, prevention of violence, prosecution of criminals, and participation by children.

At an international level, it is also expected that the UN supports countries in their task of implementation, mainstreams the recommendations of the Study Report to the UN General Assembly (elaborated in this book), and monitors achievements. The coordination among the various UN entities involved in this process is again essential to ensure the continuity of the holistic and multidisciplinary approach suggested by the Study. Bearing this in mind, the report recommended that a Special Representative for the Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children be appointed, to provide a focal point and act as a global advocate on the issues of violence against children, building on the worldwide momentum generated by the Study process and the report itself. In an effort to accelerate progress at country level, a global Inter-Agency Group on Violence against Children was established in 2005, chaired by UNICEF with the direct support of OHCHR and WHO. Membership includes a range of other UN agencies and NGOs. These efforts should contribute to the UN reform process by increasing coordination among existing entities, refining and clarifying mandates, and increasing the attention given to violence against children across and within existing mandates.

“Violence can be prevented... A wide range of positive strategies are available to help societies reduce violence. These include: training and supporting new parents; helping children learn social skills; assisting communities to control the availability of alcohol; increasing incentives for young people to complete their studies; enhancing services for victims of violence; and strengthening policies that promote gender, social and economic equality.”

The late Lee Jong-wook, Former Director-General, WHO, 2005



Ending violence against children is a matter of urgency. Children cannot afford for this Study to be merely one more report that gathers dust on shelves around the world. Action to implement the recommendations must begin immediately. The core message of the Study is that no violence against children is justifiable; all violence against children is preventable. There should be no more excuses or delays: the problem is out in the open, the obligations of Governments are clear, and the means to deal with it are known, affordable, and available.

Governments are ultimately responsible for the protection of children. It is therefore up to Governments to act now, to fulfil their human rights obligations and other commitments, to ensure the protection of children from all forms of violence. But Governments cannot do the job alone. All sectors of society, all individuals, share the responsibility of condemning and preventing violence against children and responding to the predicament of child victims.

REFERENCES

- 1 United Nations Secretary-General (2006). *Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children*. Promotion and protection of the rights of children. United Nations General Assembly, Sixty-first session. A/61/299.
- 2 United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children (2006). *Outcome Report: Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Consultation on Violence against Children: Follow-up Consultation*. 25–28 March 2006. Egypt, National Council for Motherhood and Childhood.
- 3 Council of Europe (2006). *Building a Europe for and with Children*. Council of Europe. Available at: <http://www.coe.int/t/transversalprojects/children/>.

QUOTES

- 1 United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children (2005). *Statement by Children and Young People. Young People's Forum, Regional Consultation: South Asia*, p 3. Available at: www.violencestudy.org/r27.

“We urge you to activate these recommendations and others made by children in previous consultations and to involve us when designing actions on violence against girls and boys in each country and region.”

Children's statement, Young People's Forum, South Asia, 2005¹

