

# WORLD REPORT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

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Independent Expert for the United Nations  
Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children

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## PREFACE

Violence against children cuts across boundaries of geography, race, class, religion and culture. It occurs in homes, schools and streets; in places of work and entertainment, and in care and detention centres. Perpetrators include parents, family members, teachers, caretakers, law enforcement authorities and other children. Some children are particularly vulnerable because of gender, race, ethnic origin, disability or social status. And no country is immune, whether rich or poor.

The consequences of violence can be devastating. Above all, it can result in early death. But even children who survive must cope with terrible physical and emotional scars. Indeed, violence places at risk not only their health, but also their ability to learn and grow into adults who can create sound families and communities.

Violence against children is thus a major threat to global development and our work to reach the Millennium Development Goals. We will not achieve universal primary education unless children are safe in school. The spread of HIV/AIDS will not be halted until we also stop the violence against girls that helps to fuel the pandemic. Violence against children is also a major obstacle to gender equality.

The impact of violence against children is fully and persuasively documented in the United Nations Study that is the subject of this book. The Study also outlines what must be done to confront this challenge. In that effort, States bear primary responsibility for preventing and responding to violence against children, and for upholding the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other treaties, which guarantee girls and boys everywhere the right to live their lives free from violence. There must be action in all sectors – from health and education to labour and justice – and at all levels, local, national and international. But civil society groups and individual citizens also have important roles to play. The UN family, for its part, remains strongly committed to this work.

Violence against children is never justifiable. Nor is it inevitable. If its underlying causes are identified and addressed, violence against children is entirely preventable. This book and Study should help to improve our understanding of the problem, and help us devise strategies to confront it. I therefore commend the contents to a wide global audience.

***Kofi Annan***

*United Nations Secretary-General*

*October 2006*

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## FOREWORD

The World Report on Violence against Children is the outcome of the first comprehensive global attempt to describe the scale of all forms of violence against children and its impact. Violence is a problem that calls for a multisectoral response. This report approaches the issue from the combined perspectives of human rights, public health and child protection.

The participatory processes which led to this report brought together the experience of Governments, international organisations, civil society organisations, research institutions and children. This rich collaborative effort has generated expectations of renewed action. Now, that action is urgently needed.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child forms an international basis for ensuring the rights and protection of children. Yet, in every country of the world, there are children who continue to fear and experience violence. The repercussions of that violence can continue throughout their lives, influencing their development, their behaviours and their health.

This report asserts that no violence against children is justifiable and all forms of violence are preventable. The commitments made at international and national levels and the accumulated knowledge described in this report give us the necessary tools to protect children from violence, to prevent it from happening in the first place, and to mitigate the consequences.

The World Report on Violence against Children must lead to lasting change. All of us share the responsibility to implement it.

***Louise Arbour***

*United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights*

*Office of the United Nations High  
Commissioner for Human Rights*

***Ann M. Veneman***

*Executive Director  
United Nations Children's Fund*

***Anders Nordström***

*Acting Director-General  
World Health Organization*

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## MESSAGE FROM THE NGO ADVISORY PANEL TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL'S STUDY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

### NGOS' COMMITMENT TO THE STUDY AND ITS FOLLOW-UP

This Study brings to the attention of the highest level of the United Nations the horrific scale of all forms of violence suffered by girls and boys at the hands of adults throughout the world. The Study process and outcome are also an affirmation of the involvement and capacity of children. Children have been engaged in the Study to an unprecedented degree. Their presence, their humanity, input and commitment have enriched every aspect of the Study.

Children's hopes and expectations demand that States act now with real urgency to fulfil their obligations to children as rights-holders. Not only Governments, but individual adults throughout the world must accept, finally, the core message of the Study: that no violence against girls and boys is justifiable, and that all violence against them is preventable. All violence against children is a violation of their equal human right to respect for their human dignity and physical integrity.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – international, regional and national – have been involved from the very beginning of the process. Working with UN and other agencies, NGOs have facilitated and supported the involvement of girls and boys at national, regional and international level. NGOs, often working directly with children and young people, have documented the types and frequency of violence against children, including the shameful fact that in 2006 so much of it still remains lawful and State-authorized – endorsed and administered by those responsible for children's upbringing, care, welfare and education. NGOs have also demonstrated and promoted positive programmes and interventions – ways forward towards a world in which all violence against children is condemned and eliminated. The NGO Advisory Panel, set up to support the Study and expanded to include children and youth members, and the Sub-Group on Children and Violence of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, have been fully consulted and involved in the preparation of the Study outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

The UN Secretary-General's Study must generate a living process that starts rather than ends with the submission of the report to the General Assembly and the publication of this book. NGOs are ready and willing to continue and collaborate in this process. We believe that it should be led and coordinated by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children who must, reflecting the Study process, engage directly with children as partners.

Children have underlined with passion the urgency of stopping all this violence; Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro has responded by setting essential time-bound targets for Governments, which bear the

primary obligation to prevent violence and respond. We will work together with Governments to meet these targets, and in particular:

- to ensure that all currently lawfully accepted violence against girls and boys, including all corporal punishment, all harmful traditional practices, and all sexual violence, is prohibited and also effectively eliminated through awareness raising and public education;
- to support the development of a multi-faceted and systematic framework to respond to violence against children, fully integrated within national planning processes.

Finally, we would like to express our thanks to Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, who has led the Study process in an open and participatory fashion, travelled tirelessly and proved himself to be an attentive and responsive listener to children.

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1 Members of the Sub-Group on Violence of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child include: African Child Policy Forum; Arigatou Foundation; ECPAT International; Friends World Committee for Consultation; Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children; Human Rights Watch; International Alliance of Women; International Catholic Child Bureau (ICCB/BICE); International Council of Women; International Federation of Social Workers; International Federation Terre des Hommes; International Save the Children Alliance; Jesuit Refugee Service; Plan International; Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect – RAPCAN; SOS-Kinderdorf International; World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT); WWSF Women’s World Summit Foundation; World Union of Catholic Women’s Organisations; World Vision International.

## THE IMPERATIVE TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

The *World Report on Violence against Children* is not an individual achievement nor the work of just one office, but the result of a genuine and lively participatory process, involving Governments, international entities, civil society and children. Over the last three years I have had the privilege of learning from the testimony of thousands of adults and children from all regions of the world. Their commitment to the protection and promotion of children's rights has been the driving force behind the development of the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, and this book which elaborates on the 'Study'.

The Study confirms that violence against children happens in all parts of the world. In the course of the Study process, though, I have witnessed the efforts of many civil society organisations that strive ceaselessly at local and international levels to ensure the protection of children. We must be inspired by the strength of those in the field who are confronted with very difficult conditions on a daily basis and who have extremely creative approaches for reducing children's exposure to violence and advocating for their rights.

Another promising element of the Study process has been the great interest of Governments all over the world to address the issue of violence against children. As of September 2006, I had received a total of 136 responses to the questionnaire I sent to Governments as I prepared my report. Their responses do not deny the pervasiveness of violence. This recognition of violence, and the open involvement of Governments, are important steps towards putting into practice the commitments States made when they ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The collaboration of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organisation in developing the Study was crucial in recognising the multi-faceted nature of violence against children and the need for a cooperative, multidisciplinary approach to addressing it. The Study also benefited from the substantial contributions of research centres and experts working in very different fields such as criminal justice, public health, education, public security and human rights. This is in itself a reminder that making a real and lasting difference in the lives of children requires all sectors to work together and to coordinate their efforts.

The preparation of a Study with such global dimensions was only possible through mobilisation of a formidable network of organisations and programmes around the world. United Nations entities played a leading role in promoting this participatory process, in partnership with Governments and civil society, and especially through the national, subregional and regional con-

sultations that were facilitated by UNICEF offices and various partners. This broad process of consultation was the key strategy that ensured that the final recommendations in this report are firmly anchored in the reality of children's lives at country level.

Some forms of violence, such as sexual exploitation and trafficking and the impact of armed conflict on children, have provoked international condemnation over the past decade. The recognition of these extreme situations has helped to bring children's concerns high on the international agenda. However attention to violence against children in general continues to be fragmented and very limited – different forms of violence in the home, schools, institutions and the community are largely ignored in current debates in the international community.

Family units are the best providers of physical and emotional care for children. Schools have a fundamental role in ensuring the development of children's potential while protecting them. But it is Governments that have the responsibility to build a solid legal framework and to provide the support needed by families, schools and communities to adequately fulfil their role.

Appropriate legal frameworks are vital to ending violence against children, but preventing and responding to violence does not mean adopting unilateral, tough or repressive measures. Moreover, if these measures violate the rights of any group of citizens, they are never going to be effective. This is particularly serious when countries face the challenges of growing levels of violence and crime. If Governments are committed to ensuring safety, it is clear that this is not going to be achieved by locking up adolescents under appalling conditions, by condoning the use of violence by agents of the State, or by weakening civil and political rights. This Study demonstrates that effective responses to violence involve comprehensive efforts, combining long-term investment in prevention, challenging attitudes which condone or support violence, reliable data collection, and improving the functioning of State institutions and ensuring accountability.

As Nelson Mandela has reminded us, violence thrives in the absence of democracy and respect for human rights. Violence against children persists as a permanent threat where authoritarian relationships between adults and children remain. The belief that adults have unlimited rights in the upbringing of a child compromises any approach to stop and prevent violence committed within the home, school or state institution. For lasting change, attitudes that condone or normalise violence against children, including stereotypical gender roles, need to be challenged,

Our failure to listen to children has resulted in a failure to respond to their needs. It is hard to understand why and how adults can continue to argue that children should have less protection from violence than adults do: in law, in policy and in practice. I sincerely hope that this Study will be a watershed in ending the double standards and compromises that have existed for far too long.

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Throughout the Study, children's voices were listened to, heard, and respected. They asserted their right to protection from all forms of violence, and their desire to enjoy that right without delay. Their testimonies describing the harm they experience as a result of violence, and their distress that many adults continue to accept and approve of it must prompt us to live up to our principles, and to practise what we preach. We must act now to end children's scepticism about adult promises. Children are tired of being told they are the future. They want to see us fulfil our promises in the present, and enjoy their right to be protected from violence today.

***Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro***  
*Geneva, Fall 2006*