

## **Commitment for change: what is needed to follow up on children's participation in the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children**

Joint statement on behalf of **International Save the Children Alliance, International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), International Alliance of Women, Franciscans International, SOS-Kinderdorf International, Plan International, Defence for Children International, ECPAT International, Bureau of International Solidarity – Marist Brothers, Child Rights Information Network (CRIN); Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children**<sup>1</sup>

### **Special Event: Violence against Children**

4<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council

Thank you Mr President.

Mr President, Independent Expert, representatives of the UN agencies, ladies and gentlemen, Save the Children and other NGOs welcomed the focus from the beginning of the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children on the meaningful and ethical participation of girls and boys as a key and overarching component of a overall strategy to address violence against girls and boys.

For NGOs the core purpose of children's participation is to empower them as individuals and members of civil society so that they have the opportunity to express their views, to be involved in decision making and to take action to bring about positive changes in the position and lives of girls and boys.

During the course of the UN Study on Violence against Children NGOs and UNICEF have stressed and highlighted the importance of learning from the different experiences of children when developing programs and policies to address violence against girls and boys. NGOs have equally encouraged the development and strengthening of children's own initiatives to address violence against them and have supported them to take action, in partnership with adults. NGOs have always clearly emphasised, however, that the responsibility for addressing violence against children lies ultimately with governments as primary duty bearers and with the adult community in general. It is, however, important that children's participation needs to be fully integrated in all efforts to provide better protection to children.

During the UN Study the 'level and quality of the participation of children' was highlighted and commended.<sup>2</sup> As a result of children's involvement and advocacy, primarily at the local, national and regional levels but also at the global level, many of their recommendations worked their way through regional declarations and into the final global UN Study report.

Mr President,

In order to ensure continued accountability to the children involved in this process and in their own daily efforts to address issues that concern them, governments, UN agencies and other

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<sup>1</sup> The last three NGOs in the list do not have consultative Status with the UN

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly, Sixty-first session, Third Committee, Promotion and protection of the rights of the child, 17 November 2006, paragraph 14

adults must act now on these recommendations from children and create genuine spaces to involve children in designing programs and policies to address violence against children. This includes changing adult decision making structures so that they are more 'friendly' to enable children to more actively engage with them. It includes making more child and diversity friendly information and materials available on violence against children which children can properly access in languages, formats and through medium that they best prefer and most use. It means an increased commitment to creating inclusive and child friendly child protection committees or mechanisms in schools, hospitals, communities, workplaces – in the places where children live, work, play and learn. It means continuing to build capacity on children's participation using the good practice standards and guidelines already developed and widely used during the UN Study.

Children and young people also need to be more widely recognised as social actors, partners, stakeholders and allies in the fight to positively change the position and condition of girls and boys in society. Support should be given to strengthen children's own actions against violence, to involve more children in addressing violence issues and to lobby for more support for children's organisations and child led initiatives to end violence against girls and boys.

There are several examples highlighting how children's own processes have benefited in many different ways from their engagement with work to address violence against them at the grass-roots level, work which has also in some cases been complemented by their engagement with the UN Study. At local and national levels children have organised themselves into collective forces to combat sexual abuse, early and child marriage, violence against children in conflict with the law. They have made decision makers and care givers accountable.

Mr President,

As one young participant at the global launch of the UN Study in New York in October 2006 stated when asked about how she was planning to follow up her involvement, "*My commitment is that I will make change in my country. With the help of others I will make a club where the voices of young people and children will be heard so that we can make a difference in my country.*"<sup>3</sup>

Children and young people have clearly expressed that they would like to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. Adults need to match this commitment. It is now therefore up to governments, UN agencies and other adults to make this a reality. The example of how children's meaningful and ethical participation was successfully integrated into the UN Study could also now serve to inform, influence and shape children's participation as an important element of the Human Rights Council.

Mr President, let us now address three questions to the distinguished representatives sitting on the panel

**Question to UN agencies:**

What is being done to support the translation of the Study report and the child friendly materials produced by the UN Study Secretariat and Save the Children into local and national

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<sup>3</sup> Young person, Maldives, Report of Children and Young People's Preparatory Forum for the International Launch of the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, 8-12 October 2006. Organized and facilitated by the UN Study Secretariat, Save the Children and UNICEF (2006)

languages and to ensure their widespread dissemination and use, especially among girls and boys?

What is being be done to ensure that children in different countries and regions remain informed about the processes that follow the Study and the impact that the Study and their contributions have had?

**Question to the Independent Expert:**

How will children's meaningful and ethical participation be supported and promoted in follow up actions both at international and national level, what structures are envisaged to support this, who will take forward these discussions and in what ways?

**Question to the President of the HRC:**

Children constitute about 33% of the world population, yet their perspectives and concerns are only heard in exceptional circumstances and on an ad-hoc basis during meetings of Human Rights Bodies such as the HRC. How will the HRC ensure the meaningful participation of girls and boys in the work of the Human Rights Council? How can the Council become a body able to listen to and act upon the concerns and human rights violations that girls and boys bring to its attention?

Thank you, Mr President

Geneva, 19 March 2007