68th Session of the General Assembly

Third Committee

Agenda item 65

PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

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New York

October 2013
Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates,
Dear Friends

I am very pleased to address you today, together with strategic United Nations partners. The promotion and protection of the rights of the child are at the heart of all our mandates and our close collaboration, at the international, regional and national levels, has been crucial to advance progress in our shared agenda on the protection of children’s rights.

The annual report before you builds upon the General Assembly’s decision to extend, for a further period of three years, my mandate as Special Representative of the Secretary General, and to secure firm funding from the regular budget for the effective performance and sustainability of this work. I would like to thank you for the strong expression of support this decision conveys.

The annual report highlights the most significant developments and strategic results achieved to accelerate progress in children’s protection from violence.

Thanks to the critical support of Member States and the strong partnerships and on-going collaboration with UN agencies and human rights bodies and mechanisms, as well as with regional organizations, civil society partners and children themselves, visible strides have been made towards the prevention and elimination of violence against children. Allow me to highlight some of these important developments.

Firstly, over the past months growing support has been expressed for the ratification and implementation of international standards on children’s protection from violence. This year’s UN Treaty Event, held during the high level segment of the General Assembly, placed a special emphasis on the rights of the child and provided a successful platform to promote, with UN colleagues sitting at the podium, accelerated progress in the ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a result, we are moving steadily closer to the goal of universal ratification of the Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, now counting on 166 states parties; and we are drawing very near to the entry into force of the third Protocol on a Communications Procedure. I would like to encourage you to join this important ratification process.

To promote dissemination and understanding amongst young people of the provisions of the third protocol, my office has issued a child friendly version of the protocol. This publication was developed in collaboration with many partners, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child and also children and young people in different regions who helped to shape and refine the text and design of this publication. I am confident Member States will help us disseminate and translate in different languages this important advocacy tool.
Secondly, in the framework of the very fruitful collaboration developed between my office and the OHCHR, UNICEF and UNODC and guided by the strategic resolutions adopted by the Human Rights Council and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, freedom from violence in the juvenile justice system has gained a visible relevance in the UN policy agenda. In this regard, an open ended expert group is being set up to develop new Model Strategies on the Elimination of Violence against Children in crime prevention and criminal justice, a process in which we will continue to collaborate closely together.

International standards for children’s protection from violence in the justice system also laid the foundation for the work carried out by my office on restorative justice for children. Based on dialogue, mediation and problem solving, restorative justice promotes a paradigm shift in the way young offenders often stigmatized, are perceived by society. It encourages repentance and forgiveness, accountability and reconciliation; and it opens avenues for genuine reintegration with the support of the victim and engaged commitment of the community. Next Friday, in cooperation with the Governments of Indonesia and Norway, we will host a panel discussion and will launch a report on this important topic. I look forward to collaborating with Member States in its dissemination in different parts of the world.

Distinguished Delegates

**Strengthening strategic partnerships with regional organizations and institutions** has remained a cornerstone of my work. This collaboration has helped to maximize the engagement with governments, promote cross-fertilization of experiences and consolidate national action for the prevention and elimination of violence against children. In addition, it has provided solid platforms to associate civil society and benefit from the perspectives and recommendations of children.

This process has been rich and influential, and it has led to tangible results: high-level inter-governmental regional consultations held across the globe; political declarations and implementation strategies agreed upon; and very especially, an important monitoring process to assess progress, address persisting and emerging challenges, and re-energize action towards violence prevention and elimination. Tomorrow at lunch time, in this same room, we will host a Round Table with regional partners. We look forward to welcoming you to this important event, during which the Government of Jamaica, host of the Caribbean Regional Consultation, representatives from the League of Arab States and the Council of Europe, the Latin American and Caribbean chapter of the Global Movement for Children and a young advocate from Central America, in addition to UNICEF which has been a steady partner of this process, will share with us the most significant developments, as well as their vision for the work ahead.
The Round Table will equally be a strategic occasion to release the important findings of the global survey on violence against children, conducted under the auspices of my office in cooperation with many partners.

As you know, the global survey was informed by reports received from more than one hundred States. It is therefore a significant source of information on national measures and initiatives designed to advance implementation of the recommendations of the UN Study.

The report confirms that children’s protection from violence is gaining increasing attention on the national policy agenda. The understanding of how and why children are impacted by violence has further deepened, and in many countries strategic actions are underway to translate this knowledge into effective action. Together with an ever-growing ratification of treaties on child protection from violence, there has been an incremental development of legislative and policy reforms, supported by the launch of public information campaigns to mobilize support and overcome attitudes and social norms condoning violence against children. In some countries, significant surveys have also been carried out to capture the incidence and magnitude of children’s exposure to violence.

At the same time, however, progress has been too slow, too uneven and too fragmented to make a genuine breakthrough in the protection of children from violence. The risk of violence against children remains present in every setting, including those where children should be safest – in schools, in care and justice institutions and also within the home.

Some irrefutable figures illustrate this well. Still today, 168 million boys and girls continue to be involved in exploitative work; almost half (73 million) are of primary school age (5 – 11). And more than 11 million are girls involved in domestic work - exposed to excessive working hours, and often having to endure sexual abuse, and emotional and physical violence, including beating and whipping.

The past few years have seen a marked increase in trafficking in children. In some regions more than 60% of detected victims are children, and girls are particularly affected. Child trafficking is a serious form of violence; but it is in addition a source of further incidents of violence, as children are enslaved into prostitution, sold into marriage, coerced to work in plantations or deep-sea fishing, forced to beg on the street, or recruited by criminal networks.

Vulnerable children are at special risk of exposure to violence – for example, according to UNICEF’s most recent State of the World’s Children report, children with disabilities are three to four times more likely to be exposed to physical and emotional violence than children without disabilities, and those with mental disabilities are at a much higher risk of sexual violence than their non-disabled peers.

Ninety per cent of violent deaths take place in non-conflict situations, and young people are hardest hit. Adolescent boys are highly represented amongst victims of homicide, as a result of
their manipulation by drug dealers, association with gangs, possession of small arms or involvement in violence-prone activities. And when armed violence is prevalent, girls are at high risk of domestic violence and of being killed by their partners, while young children at high risk of being witness of violence at home.

Overall, these incidents of violence are associated with poor rule of law, weak law enforcement, high levels of organized crime and homicide rates, and a culture of impunity. For children, violence goes hand-in-hand with deprivation and high risks of poor health, poor school performance, long-term welfare dependency and a deep sense of fear. But far beyond its impact on child victims and their families, violence is associated with far-reaching costs for society, diverting billions of dollars from social spending, slowing economic development and eroding nations’ human and social capital.

Dear Friends

The Global Survey confirms that the recommendations made in the UN Study on Violence against Children remain as relevant today as they were in 2006. Acting upon them represents an opportunity to reaffirm States’ commitment to and accountability for children’s freedom from violence. And, more than this, it further opens avenues to associate all those for whom children’s protection from violence remains a priority, and shape the future with the enthusiasm and vision of children engaged in this process.

Preventing and ending violence against children requires a global effort on an unprecedented scale – an effort that includes political leaders as well as ordinary citizens, and children as well as adults. The cost of inaction – for every child, and for nations’ social progress – is simply too great to be tolerated.

Clearly there is no time for complacency. We must consolidate the gains that have been made, grasp the lessons we have learned, and redouble our efforts to safeguard children’s right to freedom from violence everywhere and at all times.

As the international community considers the global development agenda beyond 2015, the protection of children from violence, including the most vulnerable and marginalized girls and boys, must be made a priority and recognized as a cross-cutting concern. The human dignity of children and their right to protection from violence must be at the heart of this global effort, just as they must be at the heart of national strategies.

Thank you.