



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON
VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

STATEMENT BY

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End Violence Solutions Summit

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Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

I am delighted to join you at this important Solutions Summit. I feel truly taken by the powerful sense of excitement across this distinguished assembly! Like all of you, I am thrilled by the opportunity to achieve a quantum leap in children's protection from violence – informed by the excellent experiences set in motion in so many participating states, by the crucial initiatives led by civil society partners, and by the ambitious activities promoted by our inspiring young participants, whom I was very pleased to meet!

My warm congratulations and sincere thanks to the Government of Sweden for hosting us so magnificently! Our deep gratitude to the WeProtect Alliance for lending its critical expertise and support to this event! And our heartfelt appreciation to all colleagues in the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, who have worked so hard for months to organize this successful Summit.

Dear Friends,

This Summit is an important milestone in our journey to end violence against children. A journey which saw a critical turning point with the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its clear legal and ethical imperative to safeguard the right of all children to freedom from violence.

In 2006, the United Nations Study on Violence against Children took stock of the global scale and impact of violence against children, presented clear recommendations for action and initiated a strategic process to accelerate and monitor progress across regions.

Ten years later, the Agenda for Sustainable Development gave new impetus to action towards children's freedom from violence. The historic inclusion in the 2030 Agenda of a distinct target - Target 16.2 - to end all forms of violence against children is mobilizing nations around the world.

With the 2030 Agenda, the world has an ambitious vision: by investing in children, we create the conditions for every child to grow up free from want, from fear and from violence. In turn, by safeguarding children's safety and protection, we enhance the chances to reach other sustainable goals and targets.

The opportunities are endless and there are limitless experiences that are helping us achieve genuine momentum and progress.

As I reflect on this important process, I would like to highlight three particularly important dimensions. And then convey a special request to you all.

First, there are strong reasons to feel encouraged by tangible progress on the ground. Over the past few years, new commitments have been made and new alliances formed; strategic regional plans guide action across nations; information campaigns raise awareness of the negative impact of violence on child development; and, we have evidence on strategies that work. We also have more and better data to break the silence surrounding violence, to challenge its acceptance, to address its causes and to advance progress to bring it to an end.

More than 90 countries have a comprehensive policy agenda on violence against children. These are impressive numbers, but more importantly, we have learned their ingredients for success! We see the positive difference made when the policy agenda - in countries like Cambodia, Dominican Republic, Malawi, Mexico, Norway, Tanzania or Uganda - is informed by a widely participatory process and sound evidence, including a thorough data assessment on children's exposure to violence.

We see how influential it is to have children's protection from violence as a core priority in the national development plan - as in Indonesia - which helps influence policy actions across sectors and catalyze progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Time and time again we see how important it is to establish - as in Paraguay - a high-level National Commission with representation from relevant authorities and civil society organizations, to promote synergies, ensure cross sectoral coordination, mobilize needed resources and assess progress in the implementation process.

Visible strides have also been made in legislation banning all forms of violence against children. Sweden broke new ground with its 1979 law; today, more than 50 states have enacted similar provisions, and many others are moving in the same direction. There are also significant improvements in legislation on specific forms of violence, including trafficking, bullying, or harmful practices; and most nations have laws on children's protection from sexual abuse, with increasing attention given to online abuse.

At the same time, reporting remains low and challenging for child victims of violence, and laws and justice institutions seem too complex and distant to them.

Nonetheless, valuable steps are being taken to address these concerns. Over the past few months, for example, a landmark law in Brazil provided detailed guidance to protect the rights of child victims and witnesses, including through confidential child-sensitive counseling, reporting and complaint mechanisms, as well as safeguards to prevent re-victimization.

Just a few weeks ago, Chile established an independent Ombuds for Children to uphold children's best interests, receive their complaints, access and protect them in residential care and detention centers, and influence public policies for their effective protection from neglect, abuse and exploitation.

And in Poland, recent research by the Children's Ombuds assessed attitudes and behavior towards corporal punishment within the home, showing how the enactment of the legal ban in 2010 is helping to increase levels of disapproval of this practice while also highlighting the critical need to support families with positive parenting and stress management initiatives.

Dear Friends, encouraging as these developments may be, the task at hand remains enormous and it is important that we move ahead with a deep sense of urgency! **This is the second dimension I would like to highlight.**

Countless millions of children live in dire poverty, barely surviving on the margins of society. Deprivation and violence go hand in hand. Children living in marginalized communities where family incomes are low, livelihood opportunities are few, and where there is limited access to quality social services, are more likely to experience violence, feel powerless to speak up, and too frightened to seek help.

Children are intentionally targeted in politically driven processes, manipulated by organized crime, forced to flee community violence, sold and exploited for economic gain, groomed online, disciplined by violent means, sexually assaulted in their homes, neglected in institutions, abused in detention centers, bullied in schools, tortured as a result of superstitious beliefs or harmful practices.

It is high time to double our collective efforts and move ahead with a deep sense of urgency! And it is the voices of children - and their heartbreaking stories that too often go unheard - that are our most compelling reason for action!

More than 800,000 young people were consulted in the lead-up to the 2030 Agenda and their views were crystal clear: the future they want is one where every child grows up in safety and free from fear.

In my work across regions, I am constantly inspired to see young advocates joining hands with national authorities, civil society and other allies to raise awareness about the harmful impact of violence ... when I see young advocates empowering children to be the first line of protection and inspiring others to take action to bring an end to abuse and exploitation.

This determination knows no borders. And it was echoed once again by more than 170,000 young people who we surveyed late last year in an online opinion poll on migrant and refugee children, conducted in cooperation with UNICEF. As one child said poignantly, “I have dreamt a lot, but nothing has been realized so I'm tired of dreaming. The problem is that it feels like you're hanging on a rope... And you don't know whether it will hold or it will break, and then all is lost”.

Dear Friends, we cannot let the rope break!

Violence, fear and insecurity are constant concerns children share. But even when emerging from the depths of the worst nightmares, children remain resilient, generous and forward looking, inspiring hope for a better world with their determination to achieve lasting change.

We must not disappoint them! Together we can break the cycle of violence and deprivation that stunts children's development. Together we can prevent neglect, abuse and exploitation. Together we can protect victims and ensure the quality services they all desperately need.

And the 2030 Agenda provides an historic opportunity to do so. **This is the third dimension I would like to highlight.**

The annual session of the High-Level Political Forum at the United Nations marks a strategic moment in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. After a disappointing start in 2016 - when children were hardly mentioned - in 2017, children's rights gained greater visibility and the HLPF Ministerial Declaration placed special emphasis on their protection from violence.

But 2019 offers an even bigger milestone and opportunity that we cannot miss. For the very first time, there will be an in-depth review of Goal 16, including target 16.2 to end all forms of violence against children. And, as you know, 2019 also marks the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child!

This provides a unique platform to gain a comprehensive picture of how far we have come in ensuring children's safety and protection; what gaps remain, and how to best accelerate progress to end all violence against children.

But for this to be an effective process, it is essential that all Voluntary National Reviews submitted to the HLPF include a sound and frank reflection on national actions taken and progress made to prevent and respond to violence against children.

And this brings me to my special request.

Pathfinder countries of the Global Partnership are uniquely placed to show strong, strategic leadership in this process! Let us therefore join hands in **developing a global thematic report documenting actions taken and progress made** in strengthening children's protection from violence.

This report will help maintain momentum of the Solutions Summit and will help transform the continuum of violence surrounding children's lives into a continuum of protection of their fundamental rights.

States will play a leading role. But we need to mobilize all actors in society and children need to be at the heart of these efforts. Change starts with each one of us.

This is why we recently launched the book "Celebrating Childhood: a journey to end violence against children!". This book honours all those who are committed to creating a world free from violence for children.

"Celebrating Childhood" includes inspiring messages from visionary leaders and extraordinary citizens from all walks of life, including a foreword by the patron of our Summit, H.M. Queen Silvia.

"Celebrating Childhood" vividly captures the passion of child rights champions from all regions and sectors of society who are eager to add their voice, share their experience, and drive action for our cause ... inspiring and encouraging others to join us on our important journey to end violence against children.

Together we can help write an even more important chapter in history – to achieve a world of peace for children and to secure a world of peace for all!