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**United Nations Secretary-General's
Study on Violence Against Children**

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on Violence against Children**

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Agenda Item 63: Promotion and protection of the rights of children
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Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues from the United Nations system, from civil society organizations, children and young people.

Dear friends,

Nobody needs to be convinced that children must be protected from all forms of violence. Yet, it is no secret that in all countries represented here, every day, children fear and experience violence. In many cases, this violence is inflicted by those responsible for their protection and well-being.

Four years ago, inspired by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, this Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a global study on violence against children. The Secretary-General appointed me to lead the study, and with the decisive support of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization, I set out to determine the extent and scope of violence against children, the impact of this violence on their lives and societies, and what must be done to prevent and respond to it.

Today I am honoured to present the key findings and recommendations of this study. These are the result of a genuine participatory process, involving Governments, international entities, scholars, civil society and children. Nine regional consultations, fourteen expert thematic meetings, responses by Governments to my questionnaire, a very active NGO advisory panel, submissions by numerous organizations, and a body of scientific studies have revealed a disturbing reality. I wish to express my gratitude to all who were involved in this process.

Mr. Chairperson,

Estimates contained in my report, and the detailed *World Report on Violence against Children* which accompanies it, indicate the magnitude and pervasive nature of this disturbing problem. WHO estimated, through limited national data, that in 2002, 53,000 children died worldwide as a result of homicide. One hundred and fifty million girls and 73 million boys under 18 experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence also in 2002. ILO reports that in 2004, 218 million children were involved in child labour, of which 126 million were in hazardous work.

But these figures hardly describe the real situation. Much violence against children, whether in the family, schools, alternative care and justice institutions, the workplace or the community is implicitly socially condoned or legally sanctioned, and remains hidden and unrecorded. Many children are afraid or unaware of mechanisms to report incidents of violence against them.

Research indicates that the vulnerability of children to violence is linked to their age and evolving capacity. Young children are at greatest risk of physical violence, while sexual violence predominantly affects adolescents. Boys are at greater risk of physical violence than girls; girls face greater risk of sexual violence, neglect and forced

prostitution. Some children, because of sex, race, ethnic origin, disability or social status, are particularly vulnerable. Just as the Secretary-General's study on Violence against Women testifies, my study makes clear that violence against children is directly linked to discriminatory attitudes and stereotypes. Poverty, income inequality, political instability and conflict are among the many factors which may increase the risk of violence against children.

Families have the greatest potential to protect children and provide for their physical and emotional safety. But States must support families so they can perform this role. Eliminating violence against children is most challenging in the private sphere. But children's rights to life, dignity and physical integrity do not stop at the door of the family home and the gates of the school.

Mr. Chairperson,

The central message of the study is that no violence against children can be justified; all violence against children can and must be prevented. Every society, no matter its cultural, economic or social background, can and must stop every form of violence. A multidimensional approach, grounded in human rights principles and guided by evidence-based research is urgently needed to prevent and respond to violence in all circumstances.

Analysis of Government responses to the study questionnaire and the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child indicate that numerous initiatives have been developed by Governments and NGOs to prevent and respond to the various forms of violence against children. But efforts to address violence against children are frequently reactive, focusing on symptoms and consequences, rather than causes. Strategies tend to be fragmented, rather than integrated, and insufficient resources are allocated to measures to address the problem.

Mr. Chairperson,

I have put forward a set of overarching recommendations and specific recommendations which apply to the five settings addressed by the study. I call for strengthened national and local commitment and action. I urge States to prohibit all forms of violence against children in all settings, including all corporal punishment, harmful traditional practices, sexual violence and torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Prevention must be a priority, with adequate resources being allocated to address underlying cases and risk factors. States and civil society should strive to transform attitudes that condone or normalize violence against children, in particular by addressing its gender dimensions.

To ensure quick response to violence, I recommend accessible and child-friendly protection systems and services. I call for accountability and an end for impunity for

perpetrators. Child victims of all forms of violence should be provided with sensitive, integrated, and high-quality legal, health and social services.

States should develop and implement systematic national data collection and research to assess the dimensions of this hidden problem and to evaluate the success of the strategies to end violence.

Mr. Chairperson,

If there is one factor that has contributed to our failure to protect children from violence throughout history, it has been our failure to listen to children. Today we have children among us. Children were involved throughout all stages of preparation of this study. They testified to the hurt which violence causes them. Their hurt is aggravated by adult acceptance, even approval, of violence.

We cannot rank forms of violence and condemn only those we consider extreme. We cannot limit our concern to violence that features in the media. This study should mark a global turning point - an end to any justification of any physical, psychological or sexual assault against children, whether accepted as tradition or discipline.

Preventing and responding to violence does not mean adopting tough rhetoric and unilateral repressive measures. It requires the end of the authoritarian relationship between adults and children, changing of the 'mindset' of societies and the underlying economic and social conditions associated with violence.

The process of emancipation experienced by workers and women has only relatively recently begun to be experienced by children. We must not hesitate or retreat.

Mr. Chairperson,

The recommendations of this study must become a tool for action at national and global levels. They should mark the beginning of a strong global movement to stop all violence against children. I trust this Assembly will ensure follow-up at all levels and give thorough consideration to my recommendations in that regard.

The international community has made many commitments to protect children's rights. These must be fully implemented. Time is unredeemable: we must live up to our words without delay or excuses.

Children are tired of being called our future. Children are tired of words and no action. They want to enjoy their childhood free from violence – now.