



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
4 January 2013

Original: English

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## Human Rights Council

Twenty-second session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children**

### *Summary*

This annual report builds upon the decision by the General Assembly to extend the mandate of the Special Representative for a further three years (res. 67/152). As the first report in this new period, the report highlights crucial results achieved and progress promoted in the protection of children from violence, identifying efforts required to sustain and scale up achievements made, and informing a strategic future agenda.

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## I. Mandate and strategic priorities

1. The mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children is framed by the United Nations Study on Violence against Children (A/61/299) and its strategic recommendations. The mandate was established by the General Assembly resolution 62/141 and the Special Representative assumed her position in September 2009 (see her preliminary report, A/HRC/13/46).

2. The Special Representative is a high-profile, global independent advocate for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children, acting as a bridge-builder and a catalyst for action across sectors and settings where violence against children may occur. She promotes the protection of children from violence as a human rights imperative, making use of mutually supportive strategies, including advocacy; the promotion of international, regional and national consultations to advance progress, identify good practices and promote cross-fertilization of experience; the hosting of expert consultations; the development of thematic studies and information materials; and the organization of field missions.

3. The overall thrust of the Special Representative's mandate is to accelerate progress in the implementation of the Study recommendations, with a particular emphasis on those with a time-bound target, namely:

(a) The development in each State of a national comprehensive strategy to prevent and respond to all forms of violence;

(b) The introduction of an explicit legal ban on all forms of violence against children, in all settings;

(c) The consolidation of a national data system and research agenda on violence against children.

In previous reports, the Special Representative reported more fully on these priorities, which are further addressed in chapter III of the present report on the global progress survey on violence against children.

4. In December 2012, the General Assembly, in its resolution 67/152, recommended that the Secretary-General extend the mandate of the Special Representative on Violence against Children for a further period of three years, and decided that for the effective performance of the mandate and the sustainability of its core activities the mandate would be funded from the regular budget starting from the biennium 2014–2015.

5. Marking the start of a new phase of the mandate, the present report takes stock of the most significant developments and achievements during the previous three years (chaps. II and III below); and, informed by the lessons learned in this important process, identifies strategic priorities for the future (chap. V) to sustain and accelerate progress in children's protection from violence.

## II. Consolidating progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations Study on Violence against Children

6. The findings and recommendations of the Study shape the agenda of the Special Representative. Over the last three years they have offered a solid foundation to translate into practice a core principle of the Study: no violence against children is justifiable and all violence can be prevented.

7. As an independent global advocate on violence against children, the Special Representative undertook significant initiatives to rally firm support and step up national progress in children's protection from violence. Through the mobilization of political and social support and the institutionalization of regional partnerships, together with policy and legal reforms, information-sharing and cross-fertilization of experiences, and the consolidation of data and research, violence against children has gained visibility in the public debate and on the policy agenda.

8. To advance national initiatives and bring the mandate closer to national stakeholders and the public at large, the Special Representative conducted over 70 missions in more than 40 countries in all regions. Country visits provided a valuable opportunity to promote the implementation of the Study recommendations, as well as to address a wide range of concerns, including the universal ratification of human rights treaties; the enactment and enforcement of legislation to ban all forms of violence, protect child victims and establish child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaint mechanisms, and fight impunity; the consolidation of data and research to inform policymaking; and the protection of children from violence in schools and care and justice institutions.

9. In this process a special emphasis was placed on:

- (a) Consolidating the human rights foundation of children's freedom from violence;
- (b) Enhancing awareness and consolidating knowledge for the prevention and elimination of violence against children;
- (c) Institutionalizing partnerships with regional organizations and institutions;
- (d) Strengthening strategic alliances within and beyond the United Nations system; and
- (e) Monitoring and re-energizing progress to inform a forward looking agenda.

These dimensions have been addressed in previous annual reports. In view of their strategic importance some of them are further updated in the sections below.

#### **A. Consolidating the human rights foundation of children's freedom from violence**

10. Recognized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international standards, the protection of children from violence is a fundamental human right and critically relevant for the realization of the rights of the child. This human rights imperative was pursued through promoting the ratification and implementation of core child rights treaties and supporting strategic standard-setting initiatives.

11. The United Nations campaign for the universal ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child was a major initiative in this area. Launched in May 2010 by the Secretary-General, the campaign is supported by the Special Representative alongside the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

12. There have been important results associated with the campaign: 24 new States adhered to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and more than two thirds of those not yet parties formally committed to its

ratification, in the context of the universal periodic review or before human rights mechanisms.

13. The goal of the campaign was widely endorsed by Member States, ombudspersons and civil society organizations and regional organizations. The pan-European Campaign to Stop Sexual Violence against Children, promoted by the Council of Europe and a network of national parliaments in its member States, is a meaningful example of this process.

14. The goal of universal ratification was also incorporated in the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons and in the Roadmap for Achieving the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2016.

15. In the light of this progress, universal ratification of the Optional Protocol can soon become a worldwide reality for children.

16. Strategic standard-setting initiatives supported by the Special Representative helped to strengthen the normative foundation of children's protection from violence. These included the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 189 (2011) concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers. With these two new instruments, children can have access to effective remedies to address incidents of violence and benefit from safeguards providing protection in situations of domestic service. The ratification and effective implementation of these instruments will remain a priority.

## **B. Enhancing awareness and consolidating knowledge**

17. To advance implementation of international child rights standards and identify positive experiences and strategic recommendations to assist Governments in their efforts to prevent and address all forms of violence, the Special Representative organized seven expert consultations.

18. These consultations brought together experts from Governments, national institutions, regional and international organizations, academia and civil society, as well as children themselves. They informed the development of thematic studies and follow-up advocacy and policy discussions at the national and international levels to accelerate progress in children's protection.

19. The consultations addressed priority topics, including law reform to ban all forms of violence against children, inter alia harmful practices, and provide for safe and child-sensitive mechanisms for counselling, reporting and complaints on incidents of violence; as well as the consolidation of data and research to inform legal and policy developments; and the protection of children from violence in early childhood, schools and the justice system.

20. In view of their critical relevance for the work ahead, the overall conclusions and recommendations from the seven consultations are synthesized below.

### **1. Law reform to safeguard children from violence**

21. Legislation prohibiting all forms of violence is a key component of a comprehensive national strategy for children's protection from violence. To take stock of progress, identify positive experiences and advance legal reform in this area, the Special Representative organized, in July 2011, an expert consultation with OHCHR, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the NGO Advisory Council on Violence against Children. The consultation highlighted the following key conclusions and recommendations (see also A/HRC/19/64):

(a) A strong national normative framework is vital to prevent and respond to violence, protect child victims and witnesses, ensure their recovery, reintegration and redress, and fight impunity;

(b) Law reform needs to be pursued through a comprehensive review of national legislation to ensure conformity with international human rights standards and overcome dispersed action; it requires the introduction of an explicit legal ban on all forms of violence in all settings, supplemented by detailed provisions in relevant pieces of legislation to tackle distinct manifestations of violence and the various contexts within which violence may occur; national legislation needs to be periodically reviewed and evaluated to address gaps and emerging concerns;

(c) Law enactment needs to be upheld by an effective process of implementation and the allocation of sound resources; implementation initiatives should be conducted by well-coordinated institutions and services, and supported by a plan of implementation, as well as an estimation of costs and an anticipated allocation of resources;

(d) Information and social mobilization campaigns, together with capacity-building of professionals working with and for children, remain vital to generate a culture of non-violence, overcome social norms condoning violence, encourage positive attitudes and behaviour towards children and widen the ownership of children's protection from violence. Advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns on legal provisions and their effective use, combined with strong alliances with strategic partners, including parliamentarians, national independent institutions, religious and local leaders, grass-root organizations and children themselves, constitute crucial dimensions of this process.

22. Law reform for children's protection from violence is an area where visible progress has been made, with a clear increase in the number of countries with an overall legal ban on all forms of violence, at times in the national Constitution itself. However, as mentioned below, it is also an area where further efforts remain strongly needed.

## **2. Protection of children from harmful practices in plural legal systems**

23. Around the world, countless numbers of girls and boys fall victim to harmful practices. Often violent in nature, these practices compromise the development and education of the child, have serious and long-lasting health and psychological consequences, and may result in disability or death. At the same time, positive experiences have led to the successful abandonment of these practices and a lasting commitment by concerned communities to prevent their occurrence and safeguard the protection of children's rights.

24. In order to reflect on these questions and identify opportunities for change, in 2012 the Special Representative and the non-governmental organization Plan International co-hosted an international expert consultation (see A/67/230, paras. 17–20), in close cooperation with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF, OHCHR and the International NGO Council on Violence against Children.

25. The consultation identified critical challenges, including the lack of legislation prohibiting harmful practices, inconsistencies in regulations, selective and ill-resourced implementation and compliance, social acceptance of these practices within communities, prejudices among personnel and weak capacity to address children's rights among law enforcement officials, the judiciary, traditional leaders and judges in customary and religious courts.

26. The consultation highlighted the following issues:

(a) The critical role of legislation, which constitutes a core dimension of States' accountability for the protection of children from violence and makes a decisive contribution to the abandonment of harmful practices against girls and boys by communities concerned;

(b) The urgency of ensuring the harmonization of all legislation, including customary and religious laws, with international human rights standards; of introducing an explicit and comprehensive legal prohibition of all harmful practices; and of removing any justification of such practices that may compromise children's rights and best interests;

(c) The need to invest in prevention and implementation efforts, including the development of a universal vital registration system, and the promotion of awareness-raising, education, training and mobilization of communities, including religious and local leaders and children. This involves promoting dialogue, enhancing understanding of the detrimental impact of harmful practices on children and supporting commitment by those concerned to the lasting abandonment of harmful attitudes and behaviour;

(d) The importance of sound data and research, and the sharing of cross-country experiences and good practices in legislation and implementation to address the complex dimensions of social conventions, beliefs and practices, and inform legislative, administrative, educational, social and other measures to promote the prevention and sustained abandonment of harmful practices against children.

### **3. Safe and child-sensitive counselling, complaint and reporting mechanisms**

27. The availability of safe and child-friendly remedies is an indispensable component of a responsive system to protect children from violence. The Special Representative organized a consultation and developed a joint report (A/HRC/16/56) on this topic with the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

28. The joint report recognizes that, despite efforts made in many countries, existing initiatives remain piecemeal and inadequate to address children's specific concerns and are often not seen as core components of a robust child protection system. To overcome these challenges, the report presents guiding principles and action-oriented recommendations, highlighting in particular the need for these mechanisms to be:

(a) Established by law, with a well-defined mandate;

(b) Guided by the best interests of the child;

(c) Informed by children's experience and perspectives;

(d) Well-publicized and made accessible to all children, without discrimination of any kind; and

(e) Effective in safeguarding children's safety, in ensuring the confidentiality of the proceedings and providing prompt and speedy responses and follow up.

### **4. Sound data and research**

29. Sound research and reliable, objective and disaggregated data are indispensable to understanding the environment within which children grow and develop, to assess the risk and impact of violence and prevent its occurrence. Similarly, data and research provide transparency to policymaking and enable public scrutiny of States' actions for the protection of children from violence.

30. Despite promising developments in some countries, there are still significant gaps in data and research on violence against children, including limited evidence of the incidence,

risks and costs of violence; lack of internationally agreed definitions and monitoring tools and of ethical standards to take into consideration the experience and recommendations of children themselves; and a wide gap between data and its effective use in policymaking.

31. To address these dimensions and capitalize upon a growing body of knowledge and experience in this area, the Special Representative organized with the Government of Sweden an expert consultation in 2012 (see also A/67/230, para. 24). The conclusions and recommendations highlighted the urgency of the following measures:

- (a) Integrating data sources and information across sectors and disciplines to assess the cumulative impact of multiple manifestations of violence in children's life;
- (b) Addressing knowledge gaps, including on the root causes and the incidence of violence during the life cycle of the child; the impact of economic crises, political instability and natural disasters on children's protection from violence; and the social cost of violence and the return on investment generated by its prevention;
- (c) Capitalizing on children's perceptions, views and experiences while ensuring due respect for their protection from harm and their right to express views and influence decisions, and avoiding situations that may place children at risk; and
- (d) Bridging the gap between data and research and advocacy, policymaking and allocation of resources for violence prevention and elimination, to inform evidence-based policies and widen the ownership of implementation by the public.

## **5. Protection from violence in schools**

32. Education plays a crucial role in tackling violence against children and between children. Schools have a unique potential to create a positive environment in which attitudes condoning violence can be changed and non-violent behaviour can be learned. Recognizing the crucial importance of education in safeguarding children's rights and violence-free schools as catalysts for non-violence in the communities that they serve, in 2011 the Special Representative joined the Government of Norway and the Council of Europe in the organization of an expert consultation on this topic (see also A/HRC/19/64).

33. The meeting called for a multidimensional strategy and:

- (a) Holistic, participatory and child-centred strategies to bring an end to violence in school. These strategies should aim to secure a safe and child-friendly environment inside education settings, address the cultural acceptance of violence against children, and promote positive discipline initiatives amongst families and in the community at large;
- (b) Partnering with children to counter the invisibility of violence, capture children's perceptions and experience and enhance the effectiveness of violence prevention and elimination efforts;
- (c) Strengthening the crucial role of teachers and school staff who need to be provided with the necessary skills, training, support and resources;
- (d) Data and research on violence in schools to capture the hidden face of violence and address its root causes; assess perceptions and attitudes, including among girls and boys of different ages and social backgrounds; identify children at greater risk; and assess the economic cost of violence and the social return that may be achieved with investment in prevention;
- (e) Children's legal protection from violence in education settings, which must be achieved through an unambiguous legal prohibition of all forms of violence.

## **6. Prevention of and responses to violence against children within the juvenile justice system**

34. A juvenile justice system framed by the rights of the child is critical to safeguard children's access to justice and enable their participation in administrative and judicial proceedings that children can understand and effectively use; shape a non-intimidating justice environment; and address incidents of violence, including when children are deprived of liberty.

35. The justice system is an area where children's rights can be at risk and where violence is often invisible and concealed, as well as rarely investigated and punished. Incidents of violence occur while in the custody of police and security forces, in pretrial detention, after conviction and as a form of sentencing. Violence can be perpetrated by staff, adult detainees and other children, or be the result of self-harm.

36. To address these concerns, in 2012 the Special Representative organized an expert consultation and issued a joint report (A/HRC/21/25) with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and OHCHR, and highlighted the urgency of:

(a) Preventing the criminalization and penalization of children, including by strengthening a well-resourced child protection system to avoid the use of the justice system as a replacement for an ill-functioning system of care and protection of children; ensuring a universal system of birth registration to safeguard children's protection and prevent their treatment as adults; decriminalizing "status offences", such as begging and vagrancy; and preventing the detention of children with mental health and substance abuse problems and of unaccompanied migrant children and asylum seekers on the basis of their status;

(b) Introducing a legal prohibition of all forms of violence within the juvenile justice system, including as a form of punishment, treatment or sentencing and establishing by law safe and child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaints mechanisms to prevent and respond to incidents of violence; raising the age of criminal responsibility in line with international human rights standards; recognizing deprivation of liberty as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate time and putting in place an effective system of restorative justice and non-custodial options for children;

(c) Establishing a system of accountability for incidents of violence against children, including through oversight and monitoring initiatives, inspection of places of detention, unannounced visits by independent institutions and the prompt investigation of incidents of violence;

(d) Ensuring qualified and trained personnel through a sound system of selection, recruitment and retention of competent professionals, and continued education and capacity-building on children's rights and juvenile justice standards to prevent and address violence against children; and

(e) Promoting data collection, analysis and dissemination and developing research and reporting schemes to assess, prevent and respond to incidents of violence against children within the juvenile justice system.

## **7. Prevention and elimination of violence in early childhood**

37. The Study called for the protection from violence of children in early years and recognized the crucial importance of positive parenting, home visitation and early childhood care and development programmes.

38. Early childhood is a fundamental stage in children's development and a strategic opportunity to prevent violence and break the cycle of abuse affecting children. In early years, violence is associated with serious challenges. They often occur in the privacy of the

household and may have an irreversible effect on children's development and future life. Moreover, for very young victims it is particularly hard to expose these situations or seek help.

39. A significant body of research highlights the serious impact of violence on children, including on their brain development. There is also sound evidence about the valuable contribution of early childhood initiatives to the prevention of violence in early years and across the child's life cycle, as well as to the reduction of inequalities and the prevention of discrimination and social exclusion.

40. To capitalize on this potential, in 2012 the Special Representative convened an expert consultation in cooperation with the Government of Peru, the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, UNICEF and the Global Movement for Children in Latin America and the Caribbean.

41. The meeting included the participation of a cross-regional group of experts, including young people, and highlighted the urgency of:

(a) Promoting strong political engagement to prevent and reduce violence in the life of young children, supported by a national strategy and by well-coordinated public policies across governmental departments and between central and decentralized authorities. With this aim, countries should designate a high-level government institution responsible for the prevention of and response to violence against children, well-versed in the issues affecting the youngest children and with the capacity to involve multiple sectors, such as education, health, social services and justice; as well as for securing adequate funding and effective monitoring and evaluation to assess results and impact;

(b) Strengthening the legal protection of young children through the enactment and enforcement of a comprehensive legal ban on all forms of violence in all settings, to ensure the safeguarding, redress, recovery and reintegration of child victims and fight impunity;

(c) Ensuring gender-sensitive approaches and child-sensitive support to young children through well-resourced institutions and services and well-trained professionals, taking into account children's perceptions and experiences in the light of their evolving capacities;

(d) Supporting families and caregivers in their child-rearing responsibilities and securing a responsive national child protection system to strengthen families' capacity to raise young children in safe environments and prevent child abandonment and placement in residential care, and promote the social inclusion of young children at special risk;

(e) Consolidating data and research to assess and measure progress in the exposure of young children to incidents of violence, supported by funding for impact evaluations of relevant programmes;

(f) Strengthening strategic partnerships with all relevant stakeholders to widen awareness about the high return of investment in early childhood initiatives and the social cost of inaction; raise the profile of early childhood initiatives in the policy agenda and in the public debate; and promote a change in attitudes that condone violence against young children, including when pursued in the form of discipline or education or as a harmful practice; and

(g) Enhancing international, regional and bilateral cooperation to reenergize political action, promote cross-fertilization of experiences, address persistent challenges and mobilize vigorous support for young children's protection from violence.

### C. Institutionalizing strategic alliances with regional organizations and institutions

42. During the past three years, the strengthening of collaboration with regional organizations and institutions and political groupings has been a cornerstone of the Special Representative's strategy to accelerate progress in the implementation of the Study recommendations. These critical partnerships have helped to maximize the engagement with Governments and develop policy platforms to promote cross-fertilization of experiences, sustain and further consolidate national action for children's protection from violence, mobilize support for overcoming persisting challenges and advance this critical agenda.

43. These efforts led to the adoption of strong political commitments in eight regions.<sup>1 2</sup> They have also contributed to a growing institutionalization of regional governance mechanisms with an influential convening and mobilizing power to mainstream the protection of children from violence in the policy agenda and to promote a periodic process of review. These include the Arab Childhood Committee, the SAIEVAC Governing Board, the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, the MERCOSUR Pro-Tempore Permanent Commission of Nin@Sur, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Council of Europe Network of National Focal Points on Children's Rights and Elimination of Violence against Children.

44. The Special Representative joined regional organizations and institutions in the organization of high-level consultations,<sup>3</sup> including in 2012, respectively, in Kingston for Caribbean countries, Colombo for South Asian nations, and Ankara for member States of the Council of Europe.

45. First, these meetings were framed by regional analytical studies which take stock of laws, policies and institutions in place to safeguard children from violence and identify gaps and opportunities for accelerated progress. *The Comparative Arab Report on Implementing the Recommendations of the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children*<sup>4</sup> and the regional mappings conducted in South America and Central America are sound illustrations of this process.

<sup>1</sup> More information can be found in the Special Representative's publication *Political Commitments by Regional Organizations and Institutions to prevent and Address Violence against Children* (New York, 2012). Available from <http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/category/document-type/political-declarations>.

<sup>2</sup> These include the League of Arab States, the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) through its Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), Central American countries (Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama), the Council of Europe and the European Union, as well as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and countries in the Asia Pacific region.

<sup>3</sup> Regional consultations were held in Ankara, Asunción, Beijing, Cairo, Colombo, Kingston, Manila, Marrakech, Monaco, Santo Domingo and Vienna.

<sup>4</sup> Secretariat General of the League of Arab States, Egypt, 2010.

46. Second, a common feature has been the adoption of regional agendas for action<sup>5</sup> tailored to the specific reality of each region and designed to achieve specific goals and a progressive process of prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children.

47. Third, in most cases regional frameworks identified a mechanism for monitoring and reviewing progress. Through periodic meetings, this process has helped keep the protection of children from violence high on the agenda, address common concerns and emerging questions and stimulate incremental change. This process has led to significant initiatives, including the ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the enactment and enforcement of legislation to ban all forms of violence against children, the development of national integrated strategies and independent institutions and the mobilization of support to address specific manifestations of violence.

48. Regional agendas have at times identified additional specific priorities. For example, in SAIEVAC particular emphasis was placed on early marriage, sexual abuse and exploitation, child labour and trafficking, while in the Americas a special emphasis was placed on sexual abuse, juvenile justice and armed violence.

49. While forging an enhanced process of cooperation within regions to translate political commitments and strategies into tangible progress, these partnerships have also opened avenues for strengthening cooperation between regions, including South-South cooperation. This process was launched at the High-Level Round Table with regional organizations and institutions, hosted by the Special Representative, in 2011.<sup>6</sup>

50. Cross-regional cooperation prepares the ground for cross-fertilization of national and regional experiences and sharing of good practices and lessons learned. It also provides a foundation for building a culture of respect for children's rights and their protection from violence and strengthening cooperation with key stakeholders and allies. One tangible outcome of this process has been the development of an information hub to support knowledge-sharing and facilitate access to information on the process of follow-up to the Study.

51. During the General Assembly in 2012, the Special Representative organized a follow-up round table with representatives from South and Central America and the Caribbean. The meeting included the participation of young advocates representing networks of children and adolescents in the region and was marked by the launch of the regional analytical mappings conducted in South and Central America and the child-friendly version of the South American roadmap.

52. Participating Governments and regional institutions decided to establish, under the auspices of the Special Representative, a Latin America and Caribbean task force which will meet annually and promote initiatives to accelerate progress in children's protection from violence. Moreover, they expressed their commitment to promoting the inclusion of the protection of children from violence in the global development agenda beyond 2015.

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<sup>5</sup> In SAIEVAC, this has taken the form of a workplan for the period 2010–2015. In the Council of Europe, follow-up action is based on the Policy guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence. In the Mercosur/Nin@sur region, a regional Roadmap to contribute to the realization of the right of all boys, girls and adolescents to protection against all forms of violence in South America, complemented by national roadmaps, forms the basis for cooperation.

<sup>6</sup> A joint statement following the round table is available from [http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/sites/default/files/documents/docs/Joint\\_statement\\_regional\\_organizations\\_and\\_institutions\\_working\\_on\\_violence\\_against\\_children.pdf](http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/sites/default/files/documents/docs/Joint_statement_regional_organizations_and_institutions_working_on_violence_against_children.pdf) (accessed on 31 December 2012).

## D. Monitoring and re-energizing progress

53. In 2011, five years after the submission of the Study to the General Assembly, the Special Representative launched a global survey to assess progress in the prevention and elimination of violence against children. The survey was designed to gain perspective on achievements, reflect on good practices and success factors and boost efforts to overcome persistent challenges and consolidate violence prevention and elimination. The survey findings are a critical reference for fast-tracking progress in children's protection from violence.

54. The survey was promoted in collaboration with a wide range of partners and informed by research, regional consultations and analytical reviews of violence against children promoted by the Special Representative. It was also supported by international monitoring processes, including the universal periodic review of the Human Rights Council, reporting to human rights treaty bodies and the follow-up to the World Congresses against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents and the Roadmap for Achieving the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2016.

55. More than a hundred Governments submitted contributions to the global survey.<sup>7</sup> Children and young people were also important allies and their contribution was framed by a child-friendly version of the survey developed in close collaboration with civil society partners.

56. The analysis reveals an evolving a picture, with violence against children gaining visibility in the national agenda, increasing legislative action, policy interventions and information campaigns to safeguard children's freedom from violence, and some promising initiatives to capture the magnitude and incidence of this phenomenon and its impact on children's daily lives.

57. However, progress remains uneven and more vigorous efforts are needed in particular to develop a cohesive and well-resourced national strategy on violence against children; promote coordinated policy interventions to overcome dispersed and ill-enforced pieces of legislation and insufficient investment in family support; and promote capacity-building of professionals and safe and child-sensitive mechanisms to address incidents of violence. The survey also emphasizes the pressing need to consolidate data and research to promote evidence-based decision-making.

58. The findings of the survey will be captured in greater detail in a separate publication, but the chapter below highlights its most significant dimensions.

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<sup>7</sup> Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Djibouti, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, Finland, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Lithuania, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Norway, Oman, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, the Syrian Arab Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela (the Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam, Yemen and the State of Palestine.

### **III. Global survey on violence against children**

#### **A. National integrated strategy**

59. In all regions, important efforts are being made to develop national agendas to prevent and eliminate violence against children. In their majority, Governments' responses indicate that they have a policy framework in place, be it a broad action plan on children or on child protection or multiple strategies to address particular manifestations of violence or specific settings where incidents occur.

60. At the same time, less than 20 per cent of Governments indicate that a comprehensive agenda is in place for preventing and responding to all forms of violence against children. Several Governments recognize that existing frameworks are fragmented or at various stages of development and only in few cases have sectoral policies been put in place to address violence in all settings. As a result, there are significant gaps in the effective protection of children.

61. Coordination remains a challenge, with only two thirds of respondents acknowledging the existence of a lead coordinating governmental institution to oversee action relating to violence against children. In a number of cases, multiple coordinating bodies have been established, but the collaboration between them is uneven and not always effective. Overall, enhanced efforts are required to secure an institutionalized process of coordination across central departments and between national and decentralized authorities.

62. Monitoring mechanisms to assess progress and evaluate implementation efforts are often lacking. Moreover, although there has been some allocation of, at times very limited, national resources for children, very few Governments set aside specific funding for violence-related interventions and most of them acknowledge a lack of human and financial resources to support implementation efforts in this area.

63. While stronger efforts remain critically needed, the following lessons can help guide the work ahead:

(a) It remains urgent to promote a national child-centred, integrated, multidisciplinary and time-bound strategy on violence against children and mainstream the protection of children from violence as a concern for all relevant central and decentralized authorities and as a core component of the national policy agenda;

(b) It is critical to establish effective high-level coordinating mechanisms with the necessary authority and influence and clarify the role and responsibilities of departments and institutions dealing with violence against children in order both to avoid overlap and promote synergies and to train relevant professionals on child-sensitive violence prevention and response mechanisms;

(c) The allocation of resources for violence-related action is indispensable, including at the decentralized level;

(d) The active involvement of all stakeholders, including academia, civil society and child-led organizations, is crucial for a successful process of implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

#### **B. Legal protection of children**

64. The survey confirms that there have been important legislative developments to secure the protection of children from violence. Over 80 per cent of respondents indicate that they have some degree of legislation on violence, consisting either of an overall legal

prohibition or separate pieces of legislation addressing the various manifestations of violence. Yet, the gap between law and implementation remains wide and challenging.

65. The protection of children from sexual exploitation has generated high attention. Over 90 per cent of respondents highlight a legal prohibition on sexual violence against children, including prostitution; a ban on the procurement or offering of children for pornography and the possession and dissemination of images of child abuse, including via the Internet. Information from United Nations reports, including concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, confirm an accelerated rate of legislative activity in this area, although additional serious efforts remain necessary to promote effective implementation and address gaps and emerging concerns, including the protection of children from sale, the rise in child trafficking, the low number of prosecutions, the lack of data and the limited allocation of resources.<sup>8</sup>

66. Although certain dimensions will require considerable work, this is an area where the positive influence of sustained advocacy and mobilization efforts can be seen, including in the framework of the campaign for the ratification and implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of Children, child prostitution and child pornography and the follow-up to the World Congresses against the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents.

67. Responses to the survey also confirm that the adoption of legislation banning the use of violence as a form of punishment or sentencing is gaining momentum, with more than 60 per cent of the responding States mentioning having in place a legal prohibition of inhuman sentencing, including life imprisonment and capital punishment. More than 20 per cent of responding States have a comprehensive ban on corporal punishment in all settings in place and over 50 per cent a partial prohibition.

68. Almost all States have foreseen in their laws specific penalties for perpetrators of violence against children. However, prevention has not received a similar attention and very few reports highlight a comprehensive legal framework to prevent incidents of violence. Similarly, while legislation on recovery and reintegration of child victims is mentioned in more than half of the replies, legal redress for acts of violence, including compensation, is reported by only 13 per cent of the respondents.

69. Child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaint mechanisms constitute another area lacking investment. Although some respondents mention the availability of helplines and police services, in most cases child-focused mechanisms either are not in place or are ill-resourced, lacking human and financial capacity to address children's concerns; in the majority of cases, national independent institutions are not available. Reporting on incidents of violence remains a challenge, with very few States having issued guidance for professionals working for and with children, and only 25 per cent having clear provisions on mandatory reporting. The guiding principles and recommendations presented by the Special Representative in a previous report on this matter (A/HRC/16/56) remain fully relevant to accelerating progress.

70. Another significant gap revealed by the survey is the dearth of data on laws, policies and advocacy on the gender dimensions of violence and the legal protection of girls: 40 per cent of the respondents provide no information on this question and less than 30 per cent mention positive initiatives. Legislation in the area remains a challenge, with less than half

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, International Labour Office, *Accelerating Action against Child Labour* (Geneva, 2010); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* (2009); International Organization for Migration, *IOM 2011 Case Data on Human Trafficking: Global Figures & Trends* (2012).

of Governments indicating the enactment of a legal ban on harmful practices, which may fully or only partially cover female genital mutilation/cutting, child or forced marriage, witchcraft rituals, honour killings and other practices.

71. Less than 30 per cent of respondents indicate 18 as the minimum age for marriage, with younger ages and different thresholds for boys and girls prevalent in a large number of countries.

72. As noted above, over the past few years, law reform on violence against children has gained momentum. However, this wide-ranging process has been insufficient to secure a clear and all-embracing prohibition of all forms of violence. Steady and enhanced efforts are needed in the years ahead and it remains urgent to enact such explicit national legal bans, supplemented by detailed provisions in relevant pieces of legislation to guide effective enforcement. Legislation needs to address the root causes and risk factors of violence, lend effective protection to children in situations of vulnerability and be supported by well-resourced child protection services, well-trained professionals and a wide participatory process of public awareness-raising and social mobilization.

### **C. Sound data and research**

73. Despite incremental initiatives to break the invisibility of violence and mobilize action to address it, the global survey confirms that information on violence against children remains scarce and fragmented, with limited data available on the extent and impact of violence against children, risk factors and the underlying attitudes and social norms that perpetuate such violence. As a result, there is a costly impact on child victims and witnesses, their families and society as a whole.

74. While some Governments mention statistical information gathered by certain departments, including health, labour, judicial and law enforcement institutions, very few have periodic analytical reports on children's exposure to violence.

75. Overall, there is lack of comprehensive and disaggregated data systems to inform strategic interventions. Although 31 per cent of Governments report collecting some data, those efforts are often not child-specific; over 10 per cent indicate no collection of relevant data and around 55 per cent provide no information on this section of the survey.

76. In most cases, information is limited to a few areas, such as health and justice, with limited disaggregation on the basis of gender, age, social origin or disability.

77. The coordination of data sources remains challenging, with multiple institutions gathering and handling dispersed information, based on different definitions and indicators. When a central institution is in place, the information is often collected from limited sources, or only addresses some manifestations of violence or settings within which it occurs. Moreover, there is seldom regular periodicity of data-gathering efforts and lack of cooperation between statistical bodies and institutions responsible for the design and implementation of policies to protect children from violence. As a result, it is difficult to gain a holistic view of the incidence and cumulative impact of violence on children or enable the prevention of violence to have a genuine chance of succeeding.

78. A scarcity of resources and a lack of clear definitions, monitoring tools and indicators remain additional challenges. These factors hamper the collection of timely, reliable and disaggregated data, the monitoring of progress and the evaluation of the cost-effectiveness and impact of interventions. Investment in this area remains vital to support effective action.

## **D. Building a culture of non-violence**

79. As the Study recognizes, progress in violence prevention and elimination is strongly dependent on the effectiveness of efforts designed to strengthen a widely shared culture of non-violence and overcome the social acceptance of violence.

80. There have been efforts by countries in all regions, including through initiatives to disseminate information and raise awareness about the serious impact of violence on children, as well as of effective non-violent child-rearing and education approaches. In some cases capacity-building activities have been undertaken for professionals working with and for children, including social workers, teachers and law enforcement officials, as well as medical personnel and health workers, and correctional and immigration personnel.

81. Efforts to sensitize public opinion about children's exposure to violence have in some cases addressed distinct manifestations of violence, including sexual abuse and exploitation, domestic violence and trafficking, and – increasingly – violence associated with the use of new technologies, Internet safety and the prevention of online grooming. Some initiatives have addressed the school environment, helping to raise the profile of children's protection from bullying, corporal punishment and sexual violence; others were tailored to the protection of children in residential care and justice institutions.

82. To reach a wide audience and influence the public debate, these initiatives were supported by print and audiovisual and electronic media and radio programmes and television spots, competitions (drawings, essays), concerts and street dramas.

83. Some countries organized training for media professionals on the dissemination of positive messages about violence prevention and on child-sensitive reporting of incidents of violence.

## **E. Strengthening children's participation**

84. The process of preparing the Study on Violence against Children proved to be an important catalyst for the development of child participation, a process which in recent years has gained ground and is helping to forge new partnerships among children, parents, researchers, service providers and governmental institutions.

85. The survey yielded important information about national and regional initiatives supporting meaningful participation of children in processes and initiatives. In some cases, these have led to the adoption of significant children's declarations in the framework of regional consultations on violence against children.<sup>9</sup> A number of countries promoted the establishment of children and youth councils and parliaments and introduced policy and legal provisions on children's participation, while supporting the involvement of children in the design and implementation of laws and policies through consultations, seminars and workshops.

86. Alongside initiatives to enhance the capacity of adults to support children's participation, the survey shows an increasing focus on strengthening the skills of children themselves to enable them to engage with decision makers and create change within their communities.

87. Despite these significant developments, there are very few examples of efforts to measure their effectiveness and impact. While the creation of children's councils and

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<sup>9</sup> Information available from <http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/category/document-type/children-declarations> (accessed on 31 December 2012).

parliaments is a crucial step to ensuring children's participation, if children's voices fail to be taken seriously and discriminatory attitudes toward children are not addressed, these platforms run the risk of remaining symbolic and ineffective.

## **F. Ensuring a gender perspective**

88. Gender influences perceptions and attitudes towards violence, as well as the manner in which violence is perpetrated and experienced. Gender-based violence against girls includes differential access to food and services, domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, deprivation of inheritance or property and harmful practices, such as child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting and honour killing. Gender-based violence also includes specific types of violence against men and boys, including bullying, fighting, and assault and gun crime.

89. Many governmental responses highlighted that gender equality is established as a fundamental principle in the national constitution or specific legislation; in some cases there is a policy to promote gender equality and equity, or legislation to address specific manifestations of gender-based violence.

90. At the same time, there is a significant gap between these legal and policy frameworks, and implementation and public response. Working with both boys and girls is critical to overcome prejudice and preconceptions and support victims in seeking help and report incidences of violence. This is an area where incremental efforts are being made, including by engaging men and boys to change social norms of masculinity and encompass gender-equal relations free from violence, including more equal sharing of caregiving activities and domestic work within the household.

## **IV. Accelerating progress in a complex global environment**

91. The analysis of Governments' responses, together with the overall findings from the global survey, constitute a crucial reference for the years ahead. The findings confirm the urgency of consolidating and scaling up initiatives to achieve the three priority goals pursued by the Special Representative, namely developing a well-coordinated and well-resourced national agenda on violence against children, enacting a comprehensive and explicit legal ban on all forms of violence and consolidating data and research to inform accelerated progress in this field.

92. The implementation of the Study recommendations over the last three years has also helped a better understanding of the multidimensional nature of violence and the importance of maintaining a holistic view of the child in all initiatives for violence prevention and elimination. It is indispensable to address the cumulative exposure of children to various manifestations of violence in different contexts and throughout the child's life cycle. Indeed, for children at risk, violence in the home, the school and the community is often a continuum, spilling over from one setting to another and, at times, persisting across generations.

93. Moreover, this process has made clear that violence does not take place in a vacuum. Indeed, as addressed in the sections below, children's vulnerability, as well as genuine opportunities for violence prevention and responses, is strongly impacted by factors such as poverty and vulnerability, climate change and natural disasters, and armed violence and organized crime.

## A. Poverty, human development, economic crisis

94. Children are at the heart of the Millennium Declaration and Development Goals. Progress in their achievement contributes to a protective and safe environment for children and is essential for children's harmonious development; at the same time, violence remains a serious factor which hampers the effective attainment of the goals, especially for the most excluded children, including as a result of poverty, disability, HIV or gender.

95. The relationship between poverty and violence is multifaceted and also strongly interconnected. Humiliation, bullying, stigmatization and exploitation are frequent components of the daily life of children growing up in poverty. Violence and deprivation have a cumulative impact on their development, with high risks of poor health, poor school performance and long-term welfare dependency.

96. Poverty, vulnerability and economic hardship are factors of stress in the community and the home, generating higher incidence of violence, including domestic violence. As families struggle to meet their basic needs, children may be pressed to drop out from school to contribute to household income; girls may be placed at risk of involvement in hazardous economic activities, including domestic service, begging and sexual exploitation, or forced to marry – the risk of getting married before 18 years is three times higher amongst poor girls.<sup>10</sup>

97. Children growing up in poverty are less likely to access basic social services of quality or benefit from effective preventive initiatives or protection mechanisms. This is a particularly acute problem for children living or working on the street, who often struggle to survive in unhealthy and violent public spaces where crime is rampant and protection hardly available and who are at risk of enduring ill-treatment by the authorities or being criminalized for survival behaviours, including truancy and begging.<sup>11</sup>

98. Children with disabilities are also at heightened risk of abuse, neglect, stigma and exploitation; in their lives, disability, poverty, poor health care and nutrition and social exclusion often go hand in hand. The incidence of disability is higher amongst children belonging to poorer households, where they lack access to basic social services of quality, thus compromising opportunities for early detection, treatment and recovery and for meaningful participation in social life. As families of children with disabilities face extra medical, housing and transport costs, they miss employment opportunities and face marginalization and aggravated vulnerability to violence. When placed in institutions, where they have limited ability to disclose situations of abuse and seek redress, children's vulnerability to violence is further exacerbated.

99. Poverty and violence also shape the life of the majority of children affected by HIV and AIDS. The pandemic has stripped away traditional social support networks and is associated with a higher risk of social exclusion, stigma and discrimination, school dropout and limited access to information and treatment, while paving the way to enhanced risks of violence. In turn, rape, intimate partner violence and sexual abuse, as well as harmful practices including child and forced marriage, increase the risk of exposure to HIV infection.<sup>12</sup>

100. As the current economic downturn confirms, in times of economic crisis the impact of these multiple factors increases. Although initially buffered from the financial crisis, low

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF, "Child protection from violence, exploitation and abuse: a statistical snapshot" (2011), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> OHCHR, *Protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street* (2012), p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> UNAIDS, *Together we will end AIDS* (2012), p. 70.

income nations soon felt its impact, with a slowdown in international trade, severely stretched Government budgets and uncertainty concerning foreign aid.<sup>13</sup> According to some studies, additional numbers of people trapped in poverty in 2009 ranged from 50 to 90 million.<sup>14</sup> Vulnerable children are particularly affected, it being estimated that in sub-Saharan Africa as many as 50,000 infant deaths in 2009 were linked to the global financial crisis.<sup>15</sup> For households, insecurity in employment and pressure on resources, including as a result of increases in food and fuel prices, have enhanced the vulnerability of families with a growing risk of tension and violence.

101. Economically advanced nations are also implementing severe cutbacks in social spending and promoting budgetary austerity measures to reduce national debt and strengthen their economies. In some cases, cuts in child benefits in the area of education have hampered families' ability to buy schoolbooks and cover the cost of their children's meals and transportation, while child labour in the informal sector and agriculture may be on the rise as a result of shrinking family income. As highlighted by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, increasingly difficult socioeconomic situations for families and high levels of stress and pressure can result in serious risks of domestic violence towards children and needs to be carefully monitored.<sup>16</sup>

## **B. Climate change and natural disasters**

102. Climate change and natural disasters have a serious impact on human development and economic progress, contributing to the fragility of communities, stretching social services and support systems and generating high levels of stress in communities and families. When associated with severe food insecurity or water scarcity, this situation may generate serious levels of social unrest, compromising children's well-being and placing them at a heightened risk of neglect, injury and abuse.

103. Uncertainty associated with displacement, reduced options to escape hardship and pressing needs to secure survival and generate family income are some important factors behind violence, psychosocial distress, sexual abuse and the economic exploitation of children. Weakened protection in times of disaster, such as floods or earthquakes, may increase children's vulnerability to abandonment, sale or trafficking and place adolescents at increased risk of recruitment into gang activity and urban violence.

## **C. Armed and community violence**

104. Over the recent past, the boundaries between political, criminal and intimate violence have become increasingly blurred, provoking fear, insecurity and harm in families and society at large. Children are particularly vulnerable to these intertwined forms of violence, both as victims and witnesses.

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<sup>13</sup> According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, major donors' aid to developing countries fell by nearly 3 per cent in 2011.

<sup>14</sup> World Bank, "The Economic Crisis and the Millennium Development Goals", 24 April 2009. Available from <http://econ.worldbank.org>.

<sup>15</sup> World Bank, "Economic Crises Taking a Toll on Children", 7 April 2010. Available from <http://web.worldbank.org/>.

<sup>16</sup> Council of Europe, document CommDH (2012)22, para. 22.

105. An estimated 526,000 people die violently every year; in the large majority of cases, in non-conflict settings.<sup>17</sup> Young males are at high risk of homicide owing to their participation in street fighting, street crime, gang membership, possession of arms and other violence-prone activities.<sup>18</sup> Women and girls are predominantly targeted by intimate and gender-based violence and in many nations family related homicide is the major cause of female deaths.

106. Poor rule of law and weak law enforcement performance facilitate the use of small arms, which in turn is associated with higher levels of homicide and organized crime and paves the way to a culture of impunity and increased levels of violence.

107. Lethal violence and lack of security also compromise human development, being associated with higher levels of poverty and hunger, lower primary education enrolment and higher infant mortality rates.<sup>19</sup> This pattern compromises the safeguard of children's safety and wellbeing, contributes to increased levels of domestic violence and may disrupt access to health services, education and social support, deepening children's vulnerability and deprivation.

108. Children from disadvantaged communities are attractive targets for organized criminal activities. Through coercion, social pressure or the promise of financial reward, they are at risk of recruitment and manipulation to hold or deliver drugs or weapons, carry out petty crime, beg on the streets or become involved in other exploitative activities. At the same time, for young people lacking genuine educational and economic opportunities and living in socially excluded neighbourhoods, participation in gang culture may be perceived as a way of gaining status and recognition; according to some studies, as many as 15 per cent of all youth in gang-affected communities may end up joining a gang, 15 being the typical age of gang entry.<sup>20</sup>

109. Against this background, public fear of gang violence and youth crime has generated social pressure for the criminalization of children and adolescents, together with a call for a lower minimum age of criminal responsibility and longer sentences of imprisonment. This has been accompanied by media stigmatization of children belonging to disadvantaged groups and a culture of tolerance of institutionalized violence against them.

#### **D. Cost of violence**

110. Aggravated by poverty and vulnerability, climate change and natural disasters, armed violence and organized crime, violence is a serious risk for children's health, education and development.

111. But beyond the cost to each individual victim, violence has serious costs for households, communities and national economies. As noted by the World Health Organization,<sup>21</sup> meeting the direct costs of health, criminal justice and social welfare responses to violence diverts many billions of dollars from more constructive societal spending. The much larger indirect costs of violence due to lost productivity and lost investment in education work together to slow economic development, increase socioeconomic inequality and erode human and social capital.

<sup>17</sup> Geneva Declaration Secretariat, *Global Burden of Armed Violence: Lethal Encounters* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide* (Vienna, 2011), p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Geneva Declaration Secretariat, *Global Burden*, p. 146.

<sup>20</sup> Geneva Declaration Secretariat, *Global Burden of Armed Violence* (2008), p. 129.

<sup>21</sup> *Preventing violence and reducing its impact: How development agencies can help*, (2008), p. 7.

112. Investing in the prevention of violence is therefore of critical importance, not only as a question of human rights and good governance, but also of good economics.

## V. Looking ahead

113. The present report provides an overview of results obtained and progress achieved by the Special Representative in the first three years of the mandate.

114. This initial stage was marked by the consolidation of commitments to preventing and eliminating violence against children. There has been a strengthened understanding of children's exposure to violence, while strategic actions have been undertaken to secure their effective protection; significant normative, policy and institutional developments have helped advance national implementation efforts for the protection of children from violence, together with the revitalization of networks and the development of new partnerships to support advocacy and the institutionalization of the follow-up to the Study recommendations by Governments, regional organizations and civil society actors.

115. Although significant progress has been achieved, this process needs nurturing to translate the vision of the Study into reality and ensure it takes root and results in real change for all children. As highlighted by the findings of the global survey, it is crucial to sustain the achievements made, scale up positive initiatives and widen the ownership of this process of social change. But very especially, it is essential to avoid any risk of stalling the momentum built up around the implementation of the Study or of allowing this agenda to become diluted in the face of competing priorities.

116. The Special Representative remains strongly committed to advancing progress toward children's freedom from violence. The results achieved and the lessons learnt over the initial years of her mandate provide a strong foundation for sustaining investments, re-energizing efforts and promoting a paradigm shift in the safeguarding of children from violence.

117. The next few years will be strategic for moving in this direction. But progress will be dependent on urgent and steady action, with a special emphasis on the following priority dimensions.

### A. Mainstreaming the Study recommendations in the national policy agenda

118. **As noted throughout the present report, the three priorities of the mandate remain the foundation for achieving progress with regard to all the recommendations of the Study and have been identified by Governments across regions as crucial areas where progress needs to be achieved. Thus, putting in place a comprehensive, well-coordinated and well-resourced national agenda on violence against children; introducing an explicit legal prohibition on all forms of violence in all settings, supported by child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaint mechanisms; and consolidating violence-related data and research are urgent and indispensable components of the future agenda.**

### B. Addressing emerging concerns

119. **The spectrum of violence against children is not static and emerging concerns need to be further researched and seriously addressed. Among them, it is important to explore the opportunities and counter the risks associated with the use of new**

information and communications technologies; and prevent and address children's exposure to armed violence and organized crime.

**C. Tackling violence across children's life cycle**

120. Future initiatives need to be gender-sensitive, informed by children's perspectives and experience and tailored to children's evolving stages of development. To prevent violence against them in early years, investment in positive parenting, home visitation and early childhood care and development programmes remains essential. To capitalize on young people's agency and potential and prevent their stigmatization and manipulation in violent incidents and criminal activities, it will be imperative to empower them with life skills and quality education and support their active contribution to a violence-free society.

**D. Investing in the protection of the most vulnerable children**

121. Violence is a frequent dimension in children's lives. It occurs in various forms and contexts and has serious and long-lasting consequences on their well-being and development. Prevention and elimination efforts need to address these dynamics and invest in the social inclusion of girls and boys at special risk, for whom the multiple dimensions of deprivation go hand in hand with a cumulative exposure to violence. Enhancing families' capacity to protect and care for their children, and preventing child abandonment and placement in residential care remain crucial dimensions of this process.

**E. Recognizing violence as a priority and cross-cutting concern in the development agenda**

122. Violence does not take place in a vacuum. Important factors, such as poverty, environmental degradation and organized crime aggravate the risk of child neglect, maltreatment and abuse. Conversely, the protection of children from violence contributes to social progress and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. As the international community considers the global development agenda for beyond 2015, it is critical to address violence as a priority and a cross-cutting concern, recognizing the centrality of the human dignity of the child, securing the protection of the most disadvantaged and safeguarding children's right to freedom from violence.

123. The Special Representative looks forward to continuing to collaborate closely with Member States and all other stakeholders in the further strengthening of this crucial agenda.

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