

NGO ADVISORY COUNCIL

FOR THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S STUDY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN



Priorities for the New SRSG: Initial Recommendations

May 29, 2009

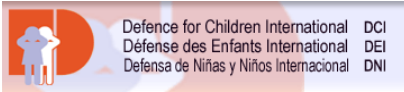
Dear Marta,

We enthusiastically welcome you as the new and long-awaited SRSG on violence against children and look forward to a close and productive working relationship with you as you undertake your efforts to help end violence against children. We hope we will be able to hold a full face-to-face consultation with you in the coming months. In the meantime, we would like to make the following initial recommendations as you begin to plan your approach to your mandate and your priorities of work:

1) Follow-up on Study recommendations:

A top priority for the new SRSG will be working with member states to ensure effective implementation of the core recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children. Of the 12 recommendations, we believe priority should be focused on the following:

- a) *Prohibition of all violence against children in national law:*
As noted by the Study, many millions of children around the world do not have full legal protection from violence. Urging member states to adopt and amend their national laws will provide a concrete demonstration of their commitment to ending violence against children. We hope we can support your office in providing detailed advice and technical assistance with the process. As individual countries take action, progress will be tangible and measurable, and will create momentum that will support the implementation of other recommendations.
- b) *Creation of high-level interagency coordination mechanisms:*
The Study recommends ministerial-level coordination



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mechanisms to oversee the creation of plans of action, reviews of policies, and ensure that relevant agencies, consulting with children, work together to address violence against children. Ensuring that each government has taken this step will help facilitate the creation and effective implementation of protection, prevention, and response policies and mechanisms.

- c) *National Plans of Action*: The Study also calls for national plans of action to ensure effective implementation of the study's recommendations. (The recent III World Congress Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents supported this call, committing governments to National Plans of Action against sexual exploitation, a significant form of violence against children.) Governments should be urged to devise such plans, if they have not already done so.

We note that the success of action plans and inter-agency coordination mechanisms can vary widely depending on how they are developed and how they relate to other national planning processes and budgets. Some are very effective, while others result in few, if any, results. For this reason, we recommend that you convene an expert group for a consultation during the initial months of your mandate, to develop a more detailed strategy for pursuing these recommendations and to provide guidance and standards for the development of effective Plans of Action, ensuring that they lead to meaningful developments.

2) Identify a small set of issues for initial focus:

The scope of the study is vast, covering a wide range of issues and settings. To avoid diffusing energy and resources across too many issues, with minimal results in any one area, we recommend that you pick a few specific issues to highlight during the initial period of your mandate where you may be able to achieve concrete, measurable progress. Identifying a handful of issues can help focus your limited resources and shape your action plan. Possible issues include:

- a) *Corporal punishment*: Considerable momentum has already been achieved in prohibiting corporal punishment in all settings, a number of key NGOs have identified this as a priority for their own work, and it is a fundamental element of the Study's core goal of achieving total legal prohibition on violence against children.
- b) *Juvenile justice reforms*: Only a small number of countries continue to execute juvenile offenders or sentence them to life without the possibility of parole. Only five countries have carried out juvenile executions in the last 4 years, and only one country currently sentences child offenders to life without parole. Focusing on these issues offers the potential of achieving universal adherence to prohibitions against these practices in line with both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Study's core recommendations.
- c) *Institutions*: The Study highlighted the particular vulnerability of children in institutions to violence, including children in orphanages, other care facilities, and detention

centers. Your office could highlight the need to take urgent legislative and other action to protect children in institutions from violence. A key recommendation was to reduce the number of children placed in such institutions. Achieving progress in this regard would also represent a measurable success.

- d) *Violence in the home and families:* The Study brought to light the shocking levels of violence experienced by children in their home and family settings. In spite of the attention that was brought to bear as a result of the study, millions of children continue to suffer from physical, psychological and sexual violence every day, largely because of the silence that surrounds the issue of violence in the home. Priority should be given to implementing the Study's recommendation that States develop an explicit framework of law and policy in which all forms of violence against children within the family are prohibited and rejected.

3) Meaningful child participation:

Child participation was an essential and valuable aspect of the Study process. It provided children with a direct voice into the process, enabled them to make recommendations and offer insights based on their own experience, and helped mobilize and empower them to take action in their own communities and countries. Avenues for child participation need to be sought that can provide a meaningful role for children while recognizing the limited resources of the SRSG's office. We urge you to make child participation a core element of planned country visits, by engaging with children from various social and economic backgrounds regarding their experiences with violence, including through visits to shelters, programs serving vulnerable children, and consultations with children who are organized and currently working to combat violence against children.

4) Field Visits:

We hope that you will make strategic and carefully-selected field visits an integral part of your workplan. Field visits offer the opportunity to:

- a) engage at a substantive and high level with relevant governments;
- b) secure concrete commitments from governments to take action in regard to the Study recommendations;
- c) highlight good practices and effective programs at local and national level;
- d) consult with children, as outlined above, including through small consultations and visits to programs that serve children at risk;
- e) consult with relevant NGOs and members of civil society that work on violence against children.
- f) consult with parents, care-takers and community members who are responsible for the protection of their children, yet may also need awareness and support to change from the perpetrators of violence to protectors.

5) Conduct high-level regional meetings:

Because the scope of your mandate includes all countries of the world, you will realistically only be able to make field visits to a small number of countries. To ensure meaningful engagement with as many governments as possible, we encourage you to hold small regional and sub-regional consultations with high-level representatives of member states and appropriate inter-governmental bodies, in order to gain commitments to the Study recommendations and ensure continued government attention and action regarding violence against children. Children could also participate in regional meetings if serving as representatives of organized children's organizations/groups.

6) Research and data collection:

The Secretary-General's Study recognized the continuing need for additional and better data collection regarding violence against children. Recognizing the limited resources of your own office, we hope you can encourage improved and expanded research and data collection by relevant agencies, organizations, and experts regarding the prevalence and incidence of violence against children, and also its causes and effective responses. A particular emphasis should be ensuring that data collection becomes an integrated part of child protection systems.

7) Engagement with NGOs:

We recognize and appreciate your commitment to working closely with NGOs. We urge you to set up a regular system of consultation with the NGO Advisory Council for follow-up to the UN Study on Violence against Children, including a face-to-face consultation at an early opportunity (hopefully September or October). In addition, we trust you will regularly consult with NGOs during field visits, and with other relevant groups, including the NGO Group for the CRC and its subgroup on violence against children.

8) Engagement with and by other agencies:

The inter-agency support for the UN Study and its multi-disciplinary approach was both unique and valuable. We hope that you will work to ensure continued engagement by all relevant UN agencies in the important task of implementing the Study's recommendations, and in particular, work with agencies that maintain an in-country presence to ensure that preventing and responding to violence against children is an integral and high priority for their research, programs, and advocacy.

9) Staffing and office:

We are pleased to understand that the SRSG will be housed in the UN secretariat in an independent office. We believe this is important and appropriate, and will reinforce the independent and high-level nature of the office. While welcoming the support of UN agencies for the office, we also urge you to undertake an independent selection process for your staff, creating your own terms of reference for individual posts and undertaking an open hiring process that is open to both UN personnel as well as other individuals with relevant experience.

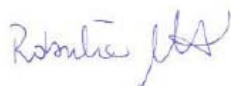
We also hope that you will consider including a child participation advisor or focal point within your staff.

We are committed to working with you to ensure that your mandate is successful, and look forward to meeting with you soon to discuss your priorities, strategies, workplan, and how we can most effectively collaborate with you.

Sincerely yours,



Peter Newell
Co Chairs, NGO Advisory Council



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