



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

**EIGHTH HIGH-LEVEL CROSS-REGIONAL ROUND TABLE  
ON THE PREVENTION AND ELIMINATION  
OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN**

**Thimphu, Bhutan 9-11 May 2018**

**Concept Note**

**1. Introduction**

Regional inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations play a key role in the promotion of enhanced accountability for children's rights, including their right to freedom from violence. The efforts at the regional level to ensure effective follow-up to the UN Study on Violence against Children have translated into legal standards, public policies, research, monitoring tools and campaigns that are supporting, stimulating and reviewing States' efforts to prevent and respond to violence against children (VAC).

Strengthening regional commitments, processes and initiatives, and enhancing cross-regional and South-South cooperation, are priorities for the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children. By convening an annual meeting of regional organizations and institutions for advancing the protection of children from violence, the Special Representative provides a platform to share knowledge and good practices, facilitate cross-fertilization of experience, and contribute to accelerating progress in children's protection from violence.

The Eighth Cross-Regional Round Table will build on the recommendations from previous meetings, particularly those on advancing progress towards reaching the VAC-related targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The upcoming sessions of the High-Level Political Forum<sup>1</sup> (HLPF) will provide a strategic milestone to accelerate further progress towards a world free from violence against children. In 2019, the HLPF will undertake an in-depth review of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, including SDG target 16.2, and in September 2019, world leaders will gather for the first 2030 Agenda Summit under the auspices of the General

---

<sup>1</sup> The HLPF is the main United Nations platform on sustainable development. It has the central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level. The Forum meets annually under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council for eight days, including a three-day ministerial segment, and every four years at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the General Assembly, for two days.

Assembly, to review results from the first four years of implementation for all 17 SDGs. 2019 will also mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The occurrence of these events in the same year presents a unique opportunity to further build momentum and to take stock of the many good laws, policies and programmes, challenges and lessons learned from all regions to bring violence against children to an end.

Within the overall framework of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its targets on violence against children, the Cross-Regional Round Table will provide an opportunity to place a special emphasis on children's protection from harmful practices, including child marriage, and on the invaluable role that community and religious leaders can play in addressing social norms that condone violence against children. It will also address positive practices that nurture and protect children.

The Eighth Cross-Regional Round Table will take place in Thimphu, Bhutan, from 9-11 May 2018 and will be hosted by the Government of Bhutan. The meeting will be co-organized by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC). SAIEVAC also hosted a technical consultation in Bhutan on eliminating harmful practices affecting children based on tradition, culture, religion and superstition in 2013, with the support of the South Asia Coordinating Group for Ending Violence against Children, in which United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations participate.

The Cross-Regional Round Table will conclude with the adoption of Conclusions and Recommendations reflecting the discussions that take place over the course of the meeting.

## **2. Aims**

The aims of the Eighth High-Level Cross-Regional Round Table are to:

- Identify ways to further strengthen the role of regional organizations and institutions in promoting and monitoring progress at national and regional level towards achieving the violence-related targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- Identify persisting and emerging challenges to children's protection from violence, including harmful practices;
- Identify and promote measures to strengthen cross-regional cooperation towards the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children;
- Share experiences and identify common actions to enhance the protection of children from harmful practices, to support positive and protective practices, and to address social norms that condone violence against children, including through engagement with community and religious leaders.

### **3. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and violence against children**

On 25 September 2015, the Member States of the United Nations unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets at its core.

The 2030 Agenda is global and universal and is to be implemented by all countries. More importantly, it concerns all children and it calls on all nations to leave no one behind, giving priority to the most vulnerable groups in society.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for “a world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation.” For the first time on the international development agenda, there is a specific global target (16.2) to end all forms of violence against children. Ending the abuse, neglect and exploitation of children and addressing the risk factors for violence in children’s lives is also mainstreamed across several other targets of the 2030 Agenda, including those related to poverty, health, education, gender equality, safe environments and justice.<sup>2</sup>

Failing to achieve target 16.2 would compromise the life and development of millions of children and undermine gains across the entire Agenda, especially those goals related to education and health, gender equality, poverty eradication, and peace and justice for all.

### **4. Follow-up and Review Processes for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Member States are required to mainstream and implement the Sustainable Development Goals and targets within existing or emerging national sustainable development strategies and related sectoral frameworks, through a participatory, transparent and integrated process of follow-up and review. In this regard, Member States are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels. These voluntary national reviews (VNRs<sup>3</sup>) aim to document and facilitate the sharing of experiences, including positive developments and lessons learned, as well as challenges, with a view to accelerating the progressive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. National level analyses provide the basis for regional follow-up and review, which in turn contribute to follow-up and review at the global level. The VNRs serve as a basis for the regular reviews by the High-Level Political Forum. In 2018, 48 countries will present VNRs.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> SDG target 16.2 seeks to: “End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children”. Several targets address specific forms of violence and abuse, such as trafficking, sexual and other types of exploitation, harmful practices such as child marriage, the worst forms of child labour, and the recruitment of children into armed forces. There are also targets that support the creation of conditions conducive to preventing and addressing violence, such as ending poverty and the promotion of social protection, safe public spaces, safe and non-violent learning environments, and birth registration. See Targets: 1.2, 1.3, 4.7, 4.a, 5.2, 5.3, 8.7, 11.1, 11.7, 16.1, 16.2 and 16.9.

<sup>3</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>

<sup>4</sup> The 48 countries that will present VNRs in July 2018 are: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Benin, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR), Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Niger, Paraguay, Poland, Qatar, Republic of the Congo, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Sudan, Switzerland, Togo, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Uruguay, and Vietnam.

### High-Level Political Forum:

The High-Level Political Forum is the United Nations' central platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the global level. It is mandated to: provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations on the implementation and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda; keep track of progress; spur coherent policies informed by evidence, science and country experiences; and address new and emerging issues.

The HLPF conducts national and thematic reviews of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and adopts ministerial declarations to further guide this process. The Ministerial Declaration<sup>5</sup> of the 2017 HLPF gave high visibility to the protection of children's rights, including their right to freedom from violence. The declaration also recognized the important role that regional and sub-regional forums have in supporting implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as well as the importance of building on existing follow-up and review mechanisms at the regional level.

In 2018, the annual meeting of the HLPF will give special attention to the theme "transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies".<sup>6</sup>

Among the goals to be reviewed at HLPF 2018 is Goal 11, which aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. This provides a strategic opportunity to reflect on how far countries have come in implementing the New Urban Agenda and in building safe cities for children. This will help to document initiatives promoted by mayors and local authorities who have been providing strong leadership through the development of city plans, policies and regulations, guided by the best interests of the child and promoted with the participation of children, to prevent and address violence against children.

In 2019, the HLPF will present a unique opportunity to further mobilize global action to achieve a real difference in violence prevention and response as it will assess progress on SDG target 16.2. The 2019 HLPF theme will be "empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality". In September 2019, world leaders will gather for the first 2030 Agenda Summit under the auspices of the General Assembly, where they will review results achieved in the first four years of the SDGs, including Goal 16. The summit marks the beginning of the second four-year cycle of the SDGs, and will provide high-level political guidance to mobilize further action to accelerate implementation.

In 2018 and 2019, all countries should seize the opportunity to address violence against children as a crucial concern in their VNRs, recognizing that sustainable development cannot be achieved while violence continues to blight the lives of over one billion children around the world.

---

<sup>5</sup> [http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/story/2017-07-21\\_1564](http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/story/2017-07-21_1564)

<sup>6</sup> For more information on HLPF 2018 please visit: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2018>

## Regional reviews

The 2030 Agenda gives great emphasis to the role of dialogue and review at the regional levels. Regional reviews provide important inputs to support national implementation efforts while allowing the identification of overall trends, lessons learned, good practices, implementation gaps, and concerns specific to each region. Regional plans aligned with the 2030 Agenda provide a sound reference to guide such reviews and to promote and monitor progress.

The UN Regional Commissions play a significant role in promoting sustainable development by promoting peer learning and cooperation, and effective linkage among global, regional, sub-regional and national processes. Every year, Regional Commissions convene Regional Forums for Sustainable Development to provide regional inputs to the HLPF.

### **5. The role of regional organizations and institutions in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda – key dimensions to be addressed by the 8th Cross-Regional Round Table**

Regional organizations and institutions play a key role in supporting action to prevent and address violence against children, including through their advocacy, normative work/standard setting and follow-up mechanisms and support for: knowledge-building and sharing global developments; the strengthening of comprehensive national strategies for violence prevention and elimination; the strengthening of national legislation relevant to violence against children; enhancing the quality of data regarding violence against children at the regional and national levels; information and awareness-raising campaigns to build a culture of respect for children's rights and freedom from violence; strengthening the ethical and meaningful participation of children; the development of child-sensitive counselling, complaint and reporting mechanisms; and the development of quality, child-friendly services. In several regions, regional action plans on violence against children have been aligned with the 2030 Agenda.

The 2018 Cross-Regional Round Table will provide a strategic platform to agree on measures to accelerate progress in children's protection from all forms of violence, including in the light of:

- steps undertaken in each region to develop or implement a regional strategy on violence against children aligned with the 2030 Agenda;
- initiatives to support countries within regions to promote the mainstreaming of the SDG violence-related targets in national and sub-national plans and strategies, including in budget frameworks;
- steps taken to mobilize Member States to address violence against children in their voluntary national reviews to the High-Level Political Forum;
- examples of peer learning and assessment of progress among governments to take stock of overall trends, lessons learned, good practices, persisting and emerging challenges specific to the region, as well as on ways to increase regional cooperation;
- specific action that has been taken to address harmful practices and promote positive practices that nurture and protect children from the risk of violence;

- steps taken to enhance alliances and partnerships, including with faith-based organizations;
- cooperation with other regional entities on the 2030 Agenda, on the promotion of joint actions and on the development of regional SDG indicators relevant to violence against children.

## 6. Harmful practices, protective practices and engagement with community and religious leaders

The 2018 Round Table will include a public session with the participation of a broader range of stakeholders on children’s protection from harmful practices, including through alliances with community and religious leaders. This session will provide participants with the opportunity to discuss:

- traditional and emerging harmful practices relevant to their region and what is being done to prevent and address them;
- positive and nourishing child rearing and protective practices, including those that support the protective role of families;
- the crucial role of civil society actors in preventing and addressing harmful practices; and
- the role of children and young people in their own protection.

Addressing harmful practices is essential to achieving the violence-related targets of the SDGs. Target 5.3 under Goal 5 aims to “eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations” by 2030.

Harmful practices can have devastating consequences on a child’s life, survival and development, health, education and protection. Oftentimes, harmful practices are a manifestation of gender-based discrimination. Ending harmful practices, such as child marriage, will help to achieve at least half of the SDGs, including the goals to end poverty (Goal 1); hunger (Goal 2); good health and well-being (Goal 3); inclusive and quality education (Goal 4); gender equality (Goal 5); economic growth (Goal 8); reduce inequalities (Goal 10) and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16).<sup>7</sup>

Such practices generally have some cultural, social or religious underpinning and affect millions of children around the world. They may include: female genital mutilation; early and forced marriage; breast ironing; son preference; female infanticide; virginity testing; so-called honour crimes; bonded labour; forced feeding and nutritional taboos; accusations of sorcery or witchcraft; as well as a great number of other less known practices.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> See Girls Not Brides, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/themes/sustainable-development-goals-sdgs/>

<sup>8</sup> See generally SRSG on Violence against Children *Protecting children from harmful practices in plural legal systems*, <http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/page/850>

### **Challenges and obstacles to ending harmful practices in different regions:**

- Deep-seated social values and beliefs, condoned by unwritten or customary laws
- Superstitious beliefs and ill perceptions against particularly vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities or albinism
- Gender inequality and the belief that girls are inferior to boys/men, less valued and viewed as a burden
- Patriarchal values that desire to control female sexuality
- Poverty
- Lack of safety and security (e.g. want to marry off girls to protect them)
- Gaps in legislation and/or enforcement to establish accountability of perpetrators
- Lack of awareness, political commitment and resource allocation to address the problems
- Weak child protection systems at different levels
- Lack of empowerment of children and availability of child- and gender-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaints mechanisms
- Lack of family support and social mobilization with strategic stakeholders, including community and religious leaders to create a protective environment

### International human rights framework

International and regional human rights instruments call for the protection of children from all forms of violence, including harmful practices, and call upon States to take measures to secure their prevention and elimination.<sup>9</sup> To achieve this goal, States are required to adopt all necessary legislative, policy, educational and other measures, and to ensure that such measures have full force and effect within their domestic legal system.

In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the four general principles - non-discrimination; best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child - frame children's protection from violence and harmful practices. Article 19 requires States to ban all forms of violence against children; while Article 24(3) stipulates that "States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children." Article 37 (a) requires States parties to "ensure that no child is subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) calls for an end to all forms of gender-based discrimination, including against girls, and defines all forms of violence against women (and girls) as a form of discrimination. Its underlying philosophy is that "discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity" and constitutes an obstacle to the full realization of women's potential. Article 2(f) requires States Parties "to take all appropriate measures, including

---

<sup>9</sup> At the international level, these instruments include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT); and the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its respective protocols.

legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination against women.” CEDAW also requires States Parties “To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices that are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.” Article 16 of CEDAW requires that States Parties eliminate discrimination against women in “all matters relating to marriage and family relations.” Furthermore, the Beijing Platform for Action and the agreed conclusions of the 57th Commission on the Status of Women (2013) on the Elimination and Prevention of All Forms of Violence against Women and Girls include concrete steps to eliminate harmful practices against girls and women.

In November 2014, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women issued a joint General Comment on legislative, policy and other appropriate measures to ensure States’ full compliance with their obligations regarding harmful practices.<sup>10</sup>

### Engagement with community and religious leaders

Religious and community leaders play a decisive role in the protection of children’s rights, including in the prevention of and response to violence. Their influential voice and initiatives help to enhance awareness amongst families and communities about the detrimental impact of violence against children, including harmful practices; to clarify that violence against children cannot be legitimized by religion; and to support a process of social change that can lead to the lasting abandonment of social norms that condone violence against children.

In 2006, religious leaders from all major faiths adopted the Kyoto Declaration, a multi-religious commitment to end violence against children.<sup>11</sup>

The 2017 Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children<sup>12</sup>, led by the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), provides a strategic framework to mobilize further support for children’s protection from violence. Challenged by the global epidemic of violence against children, leaders and members of the world’s religious and spiritual traditions, girls and boys, women and men, from 70 countries, met together in Panama with representatives of governments, the United Nations, and international and grassroots organizations for the 5th Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), from 9-11 May 2017. The Panama Declaration includes commitments to ensure that religious places are safe for all children; to strengthen mechanisms for continuous self-evaluation and accountability to ensure religious communities are never complicit in perpetuating violence against children; to build child-safe institutions; and to consolidate evidence for the effectiveness of faith-based approaches to end violence against children.

---

<sup>10</sup> Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices, CEDAW/C/GC/31-CRC/C/GC/18

<sup>11</sup> [http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/document/\\_558](http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/document/_558)

<sup>12</sup> <http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/sites/default/files/2017/Panama%20Declaration%202017.pdf>

The 2018 Cross-Regional Round Table will provide an opportunity to learn about recent developments in this area and to exchange experiences of working with community and religious leaders in different regions to address violence against children, including with respect to harmful practices.

## Resources

Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices, 14 November 2014: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N14/627/78/PDF/N1462778.pdf?OpenElement>

Protecting children from harmful practices in plural legal systems - with a special emphasis on Africa, Thematic report by OSRSG-VAC and Plan International, 2012: [http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/sites/default/files/publications\\_final/SRSG\\_Plan\\_harmful\\_practices\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/sites/default/files/publications_final/SRSG_Plan_harmful_practices_report_final.pdf)

Female genital mutilation/cutting and violence against women and girls: Strengthening the policy linkages between different forms of violence by UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA 2017: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/2/female-genital-mutilation-cutting-and-violence-against-women-and-girls>

Facts and publications on Female Genital Mutilation by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA): <http://www.unfpa.org/female-genital-mutilation>

2016 Annual Report of the UNFPA–UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, monitoring progress in 17 countries, 2017: <http://www.unfpa.org/publications/accelerating-change-numbers#>

Ending Child Marriage by 2030 Tracking Progress and identifying gaps, Policy paper by World Vision, Girls Not Brides, Plan International and the Royal Commonwealth society, 2016: [https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Ending\\_Child\\_Marriage\\_by\\_2030.pdf](https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Ending_Child_Marriage_by_2030.pdf)

UN Report 2017 by the Witchcraft and Human Rights Network: <http://www.whrin.org/whrin-releases-latest-un-report/>

Violating Children’s Rights: Harmful practices based on tradition, culture, religion or superstition - A report from the International NGO Council on Violence against Children, 2012: <http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/document/844>

Community action for child protection – Global guidance on community-based child-protection mechanisms, Plan International, 2015: <https://plan-international.org/publications/community-action-child-protection>