



Joint Oral Statement by the International Save the Children Alliance with IFSW co-signature.

**Commission on Human Rights, 60th Session
Agenda Item 13: Rights of the Child**

April 2004

We see the UN study on violence against children as an important opportunity to bring about real and positive change in the lives of girls and boys. It provides the opportunity to develop more effective responses that give children real protection from the violence that so often blights their lives.

We welcome the independent expert's emphasis on child participation in his concept paper outlining the scope and aim of the Study and believe this aspect to be critical for the credibility and success of the Study.

Thanks to consultations with children during the UN Special Session on Children and the Yokohama Conference, a children's agenda on issues of violence is already emerging. It is clear that violence is a priority concern of children from all over the world and that they want children's experiences and suggestions to be part of plans of action at national and local levels. Here are some children's voices:

A Norwegian child who grew up in a religious sect: *When I was walking around picking birch twigs to whip me with, my head kind of filled with cotton. Sometimes I fainted. But no one knew this.*

A 12-year old girl from Sudan who has been circumcised: *My legs were tied together for nearly a week. I was sleeping on the bed for eight days and when I wanted to pee I was crying because it hurt.*

A 13 year old Bangladeshi boy in conflict with the law: *We heard that in court we have to say that we are guilty in the presence of the Magistrate. It is a custom. If we don't do so the police will torture us and we will be sent back into police custody.*

As a first contribution to the UN Study, Save the Children - a member of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child - has produced a toolkit to support children's meaningful and ethical participation in research and in consultations. The intention is to provide all involved, governments, the UN, academic institutions and NGOs with practical tools to support good quality participation of boys and girls when

- conducting research into violence against children and child protection measures;
- identifying ways in which children's participation and children's empowerment can be promoted as a method to protect children against violence; and
- promoting meaningful and ethical children's participation in regional and other consultations that form part of the UN Study process.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms children's right to express their views freely in all matters that affect them. The Convention also enhances children's participation through the recognition of children's right to seek and receive

appropriate information; freedom of expression; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; and the right to form and join associations.

We know from experience that when children have had easy and safe access to child protection mechanisms, hidden or ignored instances of violence have surfaced. Children who have access to information about complaints procedures or reporting mechanisms are more likely to seek help to protect themselves from abuse in children's homes or from sexual exploitation in refugee camps.

There are also many examples when children have proactively sought ways to voice, prevent and stop violence: for instance, through participating in school panels, village committees or child clubs. In some cases, children have also formed their own organizations to better protect their interests. The UN Study provides an opportunity for involving children in programmes to combat violence in schools and in the community at large.

Children's participation in the Study is essential both to better understand the extent and characteristics of violence affecting children and to design effective reporting systems and programmes that children can trust.

In conclusion we call on the Commission on Human Rights to urge all States to:

- inform children, using child-friendly information materials and methods, and the public at large about the Study so as to help create an open and public discussion around different forms of violence against children and ways of combating it;
- include a strong focus on violence against children and consult with girls and boys of various ages and backgrounds on all relevant national plans of actions (NPAs) and policies, including the NPA to follow-up the UN Special Session on Children, and in all consultations leading to their development and implementation; and to
- support financially the Study secretariat and so that it can fulfil a pro-active role in involving children as outlined in the independent expert's concept paper.