



**Statement by Marta Santos Pais
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on Violence against Children**

Octopus Conference

Cooperation against Cybercrime

Strasbourg, 17 June 2015

Mr Secretary General,
Distinguished members of the Podium,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very pleased to participate in the Octopus Conference and to join your important discussions.

In my global mandate as UN SRSG VAC, I am committed to working closely together with a wide range of partners to raise awareness on children's right to protection from violence; to mobilize action and support to violence prevention and elimination; and to promote cross fertilization of experiences across regions and institutions.

The Council of Europe is a crucial partner in this process. Thanks to its well-known work for the promotion of human rights, the consolidation of democracy and the safeguard of the rule of law, the strengthening of sound legal standards, as well as through its robust monitoring mechanisms, the Council has been central to the efforts promoted across the European region to secure children's freedom from violence.

The Council of Europe is equally a **pioneer in addressing threats of cybercrime**, including the sexual exploitation and abuse of children through information and communication technologies. Indeed children need to be at the heart of our concerns. This is a high priority for my mandate and the **Budapest Convention and the Lanzarote Convention** are core references for the work we promote around the world.

These two comprehensive and advanced set of standards are framed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and complement its Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, in force in 169 countries.

Being open to accession by states in other parts of the world, these two Council of Europe Conventions are inspiring changes in legislation and policies both in Europe and beyond and

in turn helping to improve States capacity to prevent serious child's rights violations, to provide genuine protection to child victims, and to fight impunity.

Countries all over the globe appreciate the forum that the Council of Europe is offering to discuss and address cybercrime. It can instigate real concerted international effort to protect children from cyber-space offences. I am therefore very **pleased to be welcoming the participation of Cybercrime experts' in the Round Table of Regional Organizations** that will start tomorrow with a focus on the prevention and elimination of sexual violence against children, including on-line abuse.

Ladies and Gentlemen

25 years ago, the adoption of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** set in motion a veritable revolution. It marked a turning point and a **paradigm shift** in the way children are envisaged in society: not as passive beneficiaries of services or not-yet persons, but as true subjects of rights and agents of change.

Also 25 years ago, a **technological revolution** started gaining ground with the birth of the World Wide Web. Since then, information and communication technologies have evolved at a phenomenal speed.

Although drafted at a time when such rapid technological advances could hardly be anticipated, the ethos of the Convention on the Rights of the Child remains as relevant as ever. Indeed, both offline and online, **States are required to pursue solutions that are guided by the provisions and principles of the Convention**, including children's protection from discrimination, the best interests of the child, and respect for children's growing autonomy and agency. Children's freedom from online violence and abuse, their right to information and to an effective remedy, and to recovery and reintegration are some other crucial dimensions of states responsibilities in this field.

Yet, as we know, the **constantly and rapidly evolving environment** we are operating in makes it extremely difficult for legislators and policy makers to match the pace of change. This is why I look at the cooperation platforms proposed by both conventions of the Council of Europe as mutually reinforcing and as a unique opportunity to promote the international and multi-stakeholders cooperation that we need to develop an integrated response to the challenges that we face.

As the list of participants at this Octopus Conference shows, there are **many stakeholders** involved and interested in preventing and responding to Cybercrime. The presence of national governments, cybercrime professionals from the public and private sectors from all over the world, as well as international and non-governmental organizations is of great value to promote progress in children's protection. The link established **with the work of the Lanzarote Committee on grooming is a perfect example on how the two conventions can join forces and expertise in addressing a challenging and evolving issue.**

Distinguished Delegates,

Despite their very different social, economic and cultural contexts, all countries in the world face common challenges in their efforts to prevent and address violence against children online.

In my latest report on **children and ICTs**, I highlight some of these challenges, which include for example:

- Weak knowledge on children's use of the Internet, online risks and opportunities;
- Gaps in legislation and challenges for enforcement;
- Lack of easily accessible, safe and child sensitive counselling, complaint, reporting mechanisms and remedies.
- Weak investment in prevention (including to enhance children's resiliency, coping strategies and digital literacy; awareness raising amongst families on online risks, investment in schools and education to prevent abuse and identify effective responses, and training of professionals);
- Moreover, there is insufficient private/public cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Accelerating progress in children's online safety and protection from violence is a priority for my mandate. And I remain very committed to promoting **a safe, empowering and inclusive digital agenda for children** to minimize risks and maximize opportunities through a wide partnership amongst public and private entities, and with the involvement of children themselves.

I trust that the "Octopus community" will support this idea and contribute with its efforts to build a solid safety pillar, while promoting empowerment and access to ICTs for all children.

From my side, I am strongly committed to continue supporting the Budapest Convention and its implementation process and look forward to strengthening a strategic cooperation with you, including on ways of preventing and responding to situations where children's behavior on-line could be qualified as cybercrime, while safeguarding children's rights.

In 2016, the international community will commemorate 20 years since **the I World Congress against sexual exploitation of children and the 10th Anniversary of the UN Study** on violence against children. It will also mark the start of a new global development agenda within which ending all forms of violence against children will gain centre stage. I am confident that the Octopus community will be supportive of these momentous anniversaries and will join our efforts to vigorously advance our common agenda!

I wish you much success in your deliberations and thank you for your attention.