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Children's Rights and Implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda

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2016 is a very momentous year for children. It has seen the adoption in Sofia of the new child rights strategy of the Council of Europe with its important priority areas, which are all of strong relevance for the prevention and elimination of violence against children. It marks the commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of the United Nations Study on Violence against Children. And it marks in addition the start of the process of implementation of the new global development agenda.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development strives for a world guided by human rights – a world that is just, equitable and inclusive, and free from fear and from violence. By promoting sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental protection for all, the agenda seeks to create a world where the rights and capabilities of children and young people can be fully realized. Of special significance is the fact that Agenda 2030 includes for the first time a distinct target (target 16.2) calling for the elimination of all forms of violence by 2030. This is an historic breakthrough and marks a turning point in children's freedom from violence – in Europe and beyond.

The new Development Agenda is highly ambitious. It is universal in scope: it applies to every country and concerns all children! And in addition, it calls on states to ensure that no one is left behind, and that priority attention is given to the most vulnerable.

For children, the success of Agenda 2030 will be measured by the tangible progress made in implementation on the ground, especially for those furthest behind, the often invisible and forgotten children who are also most at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation.

One of the most important lessons of the MDGs was that countries lagging behind were those affected by violence, which was hampering human development and social progress. But this has now changed! Indeed, the abuse, neglect and exploitation of children is now placed at the heart of Agenda 2030; and for the very first time we have a clear global target and a set of indicators to monitor progress along the way.

Target 16.2 is historic and crucial; but it cannot be seen in isolation. Indeed, all SDGs are closely interrelated and are mutually supportive. This explains why the Sustainable Development Agenda includes various goals and targets on violence related topics – both specific concerns such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, child labour, homicides and organized crime; and ambitious targets, for instance to ensure child safety in schools and communities; access to justice and accountable institutions, and to a legal identity for all.

Put simply, the ambition of the Agenda to build peaceful and prosperous societies will not materialize if we fail to protect children from violence.

The international community has agreed upon an ambitious, strategic and action oriented agenda. But it needs to be translated into tangible and positive change on the ground. And this is urgent, as countless millions of children continue to be impacted by appalling incidents of neglect, abuse and exploitation. The countdown to 2030 has started. The clock is ticking and... children are impatient to see change!

In this year of the start of the process of implementation of Agenda 2030, states need to urgently adopt and implement a **comprehensive and cohesive nationally owned sustainable development agenda**; an agenda supported by predictable resources, informed by solid evidence and robust, reliable and disaggregated data; and periodically reviewed through an open, inclusive and transparent process.

For each country, two actions are essentially required: firstly, to put the new development agenda into national action; and secondly, to promote steady and tangible progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. This may seem overwhelming... **But the good news is that countries are not starting from scratch** – indeed, the ten years of steady implementation of the recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children provide a strong foundation to build upon.

In Europe and across regions, an increasing number of States have promoted awareness raising and social mobilization initiatives to challenge the acceptability of violence against

children. Sound legislation and comprehensive national plans of action are in place to prevent and respond to violence, along with mechanisms to collect and analyse data to inform planning, policy and budgetary decisions for prevention and response services.

Child protection systems are being progressively strengthened; more and more professionals working with and for children are being trained in the early detection, prevention and response to incidents of violence, and to act on children's testimonies and experience; child victims and their families are gaining access to counselling and legal advice, and representation to seek redress, recovery and reintegration.

The Council of Europe has been a key actor in this process including through its standard setting initiatives – e.g. the Policy guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence; through the work of its monitoring machinery, including for example, the Lanzarote and Greta Committees; and very especially now with the new child rights strategy.

Today's meeting is particularly timely to identify ways of consolidating the role of the Council and of influencing developments within Europe, in other regions and at the global level.

National Reviews

To promote and monitor national progress, Agenda 2030 calls on all nations to promote **national reviews**. The Agenda establishes clear principles to guide the development of such national reviews: they are voluntary and state-led; they must be inclusive and participatory, engaging all relevant national stakeholders; they must build upon existing platforms; and be rigorous, and data- and evidence-driven.

High Level Political Forum (HLPF)

The High Level Political Forum is the main intergovernmental body responsible for providing global political leadership, guidance and recommendations on implementation of the Agenda to Member States. The HLPF is also responsible for assessing progress made at the international and national levels. One of its important tasks is assessing the national reviews, identifying positive country experiences and gathering evidence to inform policy approaches, as well as emerging global concerns.

Each year the HLPF gives a special attention to a specific theme of the 2030 Agenda.

The first HLPF of the SDG-era, held in July, considered the challenge of how to "**ensure that no-one is left behind.**" The Secretary General's report on *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals* presented on that occasion highlighted that "various forms of violence against children are pervasive, including discipline that relies on physical punishment and psychological aggression."

Next year's theme is eradicating poverty, and in 2018 it will be "sustainable and resilient societies".

Both topics are of crucial relevance for the Council of Europe Strategy and very especially for the protection of children from violence. As we know, violence perpetuates poverty, but poverty can also be a trigger for violence and can create the conditions for child abuse and exploitation to flourish. Children living in marginalized communities where families' incomes are low and livelihood opportunities are few, where housing is inadequate, and there is limited access to basic social services of quality, children are more likely to experience violence in their lives and are also more likely to lack support to recover from their trauma, envisage a future with skills, confidence and resilience, feel empowered to fight impunity.

SDG Indicators

These national assessments are extremely rich and important. But they cannot be symbolic or a question of lip service. If we are to maintain – and indeed accelerate – progress and **reach the SDG's violence related targets by 2030 it is essential to have robust and measurable indicators.**

This has been an area to which we have all been given a priority attention and in **March 2016** the UN Statistical Commission adopted a **set of global indicators** to monitor progress towards the 2030 Agenda targets.

Three indicators were approved for our target on the elimination of all forms of violence against children, target 16.2:

- ❶ 16.2.1: Proportion of children aged 1-17 years who experienced any **physical punishment and/or psychological aggression** by caregivers in the past month;
- ❷ 16.2.2: Number of **victims of human trafficking** per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation; and

⑤ 16.2.3: Proportion of young women and men aged 18-29 years who experienced **sexual violence by age 18**.

These indicators will provide a better sense of the magnitude and pervasiveness of violence against children. But further efforts are needed! On the one hand, it will be important in the coming years **to build and strengthen national statistical capacity so that all States can gather data and report progress achieved on these global indicators**. On the other hand, **it will be important to consider** additional and nationally-relevant indicators that may be needed to measure progress and identify achievement gaps in the SDG targets.

For instance, there are in my view, two crucial additional indicators that we should all promote and where the Council could be of decisive relevance: the enactment of national legislation to ban all forms of violence against children, to protect child victims and to provide means of redress to fight impunity; and secondly the adoption of a national integrated and costed policy agenda to prevent and address incidents of violence.

As you know, data on violence against children has a very special relevance if we are to succeed in our efforts to break the invisibility of this phenomenon and overcome harmful practices, to mobilise attention and support, and to inform policy making.

But this is an area where much remains to be done. As this year's Sustainable Development Goals report has highlighted, around the world there is relative paucity of data on violence against children.

This may explain why the first 22 Member States which voluntarily presented to the HLPF their national SDG reviews scarcely mentioned the question of violence against children. In fact, and sadly, most key children's concerns were absent from the reviews.

Our task ahead must be to encourage States to actively participate in the voluntary reporting process and to give adequate attention to children's concerns, including violence against children. I will continue to add my voice to this call, as I did in the lead-up to this year's HLPF.

Regional reviews

Agenda 2030 also places great emphasis on the role of dialogue and implementation reviews at regional and sub-regional levels.

Indeed, regional reviews provide platforms for peer learning, cross fertilization of experiences and assessments of progress. They enable the identification of overall trends, lessons learned, good practices, implementation gaps, and specific issues of particular relevance to each region. They can also help foster regional cooperation and partnerships on a wide range of issues.

A number of regions already have peer review mechanisms related to social development and human rights. Important progress has also been achieved in various regions on an SDG follow-up and review architecture, including through the regional forums convened by the UN Regional Economic Commissions in 2016 as curtain-raisers for the HLPF in New York.

Cross regional roundtable with regional organizations

As I am sure you will agree, regional organisations and institutions play a key role as catalysts of progress for the promotion of enhanced accountability for children's rights, including their right to freedom from violence. The efforts at the regional level to ensure a follow-up to the UN Study on violence against children have been 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. And the potential to capitalize on their role to advance progress in Agenda 2030 is immense!

For this reason, strengthening regional commitments, processes and initiatives, and enhancing cross-regional cooperation has been a priority for my mandate, and I have convened an annual meeting of regional organisations and institutions to consolidate this process further.

These annual meetings have provided a unique and excellent platform to share knowledge and good practices, enhance synergies, coordinate efforts and contribute to accelerating progress in children's protection from violence.

The 2016 meeting, held last May in Stockholm, focused on **the role of regional organizations in advancing progress in the Agenda for Sustainable Development.** In addition to the new strategy of the Council of Europe, the meeting considered the important steps taken in different regions to align their policy agenda with Agenda 2030 – as was the case with the important regional Plan to end VAC adopted by the ASEAN Summit of Heads of State, in November 2015.

The Cross regional meeting recognized the importance of regional reviews to provide an insightful overview of progress and assess major policy trends and developments, and in turn to inform long term perspectives and stimulate steady improvements along the way.

Moreover, it adopted important commitments, including:

- a) **to mobilize support for the realization of the vision in the 2030 Agenda** and towards the achievement of Target 16.2 and the other violence against children related targets (4.7, 4a, 5.2, 5.3, 8.7, 11.7) **by promoting a cross-sectoral approach and strengthening implementation of** comprehensive national strategies for violence prevention and elimination, strengthening and enforcing national legislation, ensuring access to justice and universal birth registration, mobilizing partnerships and action, and by enhancing data systems, with high-quality, timely and reliable disaggregated data, **and to promote and engage in the follow-up and review of this agenda through strong accountability mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels;**

- b) **to mobilize urgent political action and public support** to safeguard children's protection from violence and accelerate progress **by promoting high-level policy fora** as well as the **development and implementation of regional plans** aligned with Agenda 2030; **to collect, analyse and publicize data** on violence against children and **to report on progress achieved**, including in the framework of the follow-up and review of Agenda 2030; **to organize a multi-stakeholder debate on violence against children and associate public figures and authoritative voices** committed to this cause to generate awareness about this phenomenon.

We see this important meeting of the Council of Europe as a strategic platform to advance some of the commitments agreed upon in Stockholm.

Partnerships – High Time to End Violence against Children

Agenda 2030 highlights that its ambitious Goals will only be reached through a new spirit of **partnership to mobilize all the necessary human, technical and financial resources.**

At the global level we have seen some exciting new initiatives emerging that respond to this call, including Alliance 8.7 on ending child labour – officially launched last week; and the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children.

Earlier this year, my office joined with a broad range of partners – including naturally the Council of Europe - to launch the *High Time to End Violence against Children* initiative, an innovative talent and time raising effort that believes in the transformative power of leaders from all walks of life and in their determination to stand up for children. *High Time* aims at reigniting commitments and scaling up positive and concrete initiatives to **create circles of non-violence around children’s lives** to reach the SDGs violence-related targets, especially target 16.2.

And I can also share with you that just last week in New York, at a high-level event at the UN General Assembly, the *Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Promoting Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies* was launched.

The *Global Alliance* seeks to harness the strength and resources of its diverse members in support of effective and meaningful reporting on the achievement of SDG 16, and its interlinkages to the entirety of the 2030 Agenda. I am committed to supporting the *Global Alliance* to help ensure that reporting on the key targets in Goal 16 relating to violence against children are given the weight and attention they deserve.

It was indeed a historic moment last year in New York when UN Member States unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We are all tremendously excited by the unique opportunity it presents to add even greater momentum to our unstoppable movement for the rights of children!

The path towards our shared vision is clear – if we remain vigilant and keep on course through rigorous implementation, monitoring and review, a world where violence against children is a distant memory can become a reality!

Thank you.

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