

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES OF EUROPE

Resolution 160 (2003)¹ on local partnerships for preventing and combating violence at school

The Congress, bearing in mind the proposal of the Chamber of Local Authorities,

1. Having regard to:

a. the work of the Conference “Local Partnerships for Preventing and Combating Violence at School”, held in Strasbourg from 2 to 4 December 2002 under the auspices of Integrated Project 2 “Responses to Violence in Everyday Life in a Democratic Society”, organised jointly by the CLRAE, the Directorate of Youth and Sport and the Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education of the Council of Europe;

b. the final declaration adopted at the end of the conference, as appended to this resolution;

c. the compendium of case studies presented at the conference by representatives of ministries of education, local authorities and schools from twenty-three European countries;

2. Recalling:

a. the European Urban Charter;

b. Recommendation 17 (1996) of the CLRAE on responsibilities and initiatives of cities in respect of education;

c. Recommendation 59 (1999) of the CLRAE on Europe 2000 youth participation: the role of young people as citizens;

d. Resolution 99 (2000) of the CLRAE on crime and urban insecurity in Europe: the role of local authorities;

e. Resolution 116 (2001) of the CLRAE concerning the manual on local authorities and urban crime prevention;

f. Recommendation (2002) 12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on education for democratic citizenship;

3. Welcoming the fact that this conference, organised under the auspices of the Secretary General’s 2002-2003 Integrated Project, offered a meeting point for persons from a wide range of backgrounds, including ministries of education and youth, local and regional elected representatives, representatives of youth movements, NGOs, social workers, academics and police representatives;

4. Notes:

a. an increase in violence throughout Europe, from which schools are not exempt;

b. a number of particularly tragic examples of school violence in various European countries but above all a significant increase in less serious but repeated, or even everyday, forms of violence;

c. the existence of a spectrum of violent behaviour ranging from harassment to verbal abuse, damage to equipment and buildings and physical aggression, not to mention racist acts and violence against girls;

d. a tendency for violence at school to start at an increasingly early age, which means that even the youngest pupils are concerned;

e. a marked concern about the problem of school violence in every European country, sometimes with a particular regional context, as in South-eastern Europe;

5. Considers that the problem of school violence cannot be dissociated from urban insecurity issues as a whole, since the perpetrators do not confine their activities to schools;

6. Is concerned that the effects of school violence on society include:

a. a deterioration in the image of schools as perceived by pupils and parents, and even teaching staff;

b. a deterioration in teaching conditions that may lead to a higher incidence of school failure;

c. a trivialisation of violence, which is likely to be repeated outside the school setting and continue into adult life;

d. a likely increase in the number of young persons finding it difficult to integrate into society on account of their behaviour or their low school achievement;

7. Therefore considers that school violence has an enormous social and economic cost and causes great suffering, and that the mobilisation of all sections of the community is thus required;

8. Is convinced that any policy for combating or preventing violence must be based on the following fundamental principles:

a. preventing school violence is a key aspect of education for democratic citizenship, components of which include tolerance, intercultural relations, equality between the sexes, human rights and the peaceful settlement of disputes;

b. priority must be given to protecting victims and helping those who actually suffer violence;

c. the policies introduced must strike a balance between preventive and reactive measures and have a long-term focus;

d. young persons must be acknowledged as being those most concerned and as key partners in any action in this field;

e. any act of violence should be dealt with promptly in a measured manner proportionate to the seriousness of the offence;

f. dialogue is the most important way of defusing potential violence, and enables pupils as well as teachers to develop skills in negotiation, the peaceful settlement of disputes and peer group mediation;

9. Is convinced that, since many of the underlying causes of school violence stem from external factors, effective responses will only be possible if the various elements of the education system, parents and all those involved in the local community work in partnership;

10. Considers that such local partnerships must be flexible and not excessively cumbersome, with an emphasis on responsiveness and co-operation based on mutual confidence and regular dialogue;

11. Is convinced that local authorities are in a key position to support – or themselves to undertake – innovative and effective schemes to develop such local partnerships, bringing together, and arranging joint action between, their various local services, civil society, the world of work and the local community as a whole;

12. Invites the local authorities of Europe to:

a. pay particular attention to the conclusions of the Conference “Local Partnerships for Preventing and Combating Violence at School”;

b. make the prevention and reduction of violence at school part of their overall policy to combat urban insecurity, and consequently assign these objectives the priority they deserve, providing adequate human, material and financial resources for effective long-term action;

c. draw on the compendium of case studies presented at the conference and on the approach proposed in the final declaration, so as to take initiatives promoting local partnerships, as proposed in the declaration, in order to prevent and combat violence at school;

d. promote broad awareness within their local services of the final declaration of the conference, in order to encourage wide-ranging debate of the issue, promote awareness and foster the development of solidarity and co-operation between the various services, as well as the mobilisation of all the local community players concerned;

e. work out schemes, and support the initiatives of others, to promote awareness throughout the local community of the need for multidisciplinary action and solidarity involving all sectors of the local community, and the population as a whole, in order to prevent urban crime, which encompasses the combating of violence at school;

f. take care to involve young people in the devising and introduction of strategies and programmes intended to prevent and combat violence at school, and to closely

involve them in the definition and introduction of youth policies in general;

g. develop a wide range of additional activities targeting the social and economic factors which foster the emergence of violence among young people, while at the same time offering young people more opportunities to learn how to behave in society and to show solidarity and citizenship;

h. draw on the principles and suggestions to be found in the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life, so as to:

i. widely promote greater involvement of young people in community life and a better understanding of their problems and proposals;

ii. foster the development of young people’s active citizenship and solidarity from the earliest age and their ability to express their arguments and stand up for their viewpoints, hear and understand other people’s arguments, accept differences, resolve disputes without violence, take decisions and accept shared responsibilities, and forge constructive and non-aggressive relations with others;

i. support programmes catering for young people after school, on public transport and during school holidays, as well as sporting and recreational activities, especially in disadvantaged urban areas;

j. in partnership with school leaders, develop innovative activities to open up schools more widely to local community life;

k. ensure that local and regional media provide restrained coverage and reporting, not only of acts of violence, but also of positive initiatives to prevent violence and awareness-raising schemes directed at young people and the general public;

13. Invites the Congress, and especially the Committee on Culture and Education of the Chamber of Local Authorities, to:

a. disseminate as widely as possible among the local and regional authorities of Europe the work and final declaration of this conference;

b. help prepare a recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states as part of the follow-up to Integrated Project 2 “Responses to Violence in Everyday Life in a Democratic Society”, and in co-operation with the other partners within the Council of Europe which jointly organised this conference;

c. help to draw up a compendium of experience and of specific examples of good practice relating to the strategies for preventing and combating violence at school which are part of the follow-up of this integrated project;

d. help to continue exchanges of experience and the dissemination of good practice in Europe, especially through the development in the course of the integrated project of networks of centres for monitoring everyday violence.

Appendix

Strasbourg, 4 December 2002

Local partnerships for preventing and combating violence at school

Conference organised by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, the Directorate of Youth and Sport, the Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education

Final Declaration adopted at the close of the conference

This conference has been organised in the framework of the Council of Europe Integrated Project 2 “Responses to Violence in Everyday Life in a Democratic Society”

1. The Conference “Local partnerships for preventing and combating violence at school” was held at the Council of Europe headquarters from 2 to 4 December 2002. It was organised by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, the Directorate of Education and the Directorate of Youth and Sport. It was part of Integrated Project 2 (2002-2004) launched by the Council of Europe Secretary General on “Responses to Violence in Everyday Life in a Democratic Society”.

2. About 150 participants took part in the discussions. They represented ministries of education and youth at national and local level, local and regional authorities, youth movements, non-governmental organisations from civil society, and various local agencies of other national ministries (ministries of the interior, justice, etc.).

3. The discussions were centred around a series of general observations, an analysis of the situation in various European countries or regions, and about thirty case-studies.

4. At the close of the discussions, the participants adopted this Final Declaration, which contains the conclusions reached in their debates and a number of recommendations to the various parties in attendance.

Violence at school

5. Public opinion in general, and all the relevant players in particular, have become acutely aware in recent years of the phenomenon of violence at school, especially in connection with particularly tragic incidents which have been widely reported by the media.

6. These tragic events, of which there are – thankfully – relatively few, are in fact the tangible expression of violent incidents which are less serious in nature but occur more frequently; although it is difficult to quantify how often they occur, there is no doubt that they are becoming more common.

7. An increase in violent incidents is characteristic of all European societies, and the educational community is no exception. This trend is varied, and does not affect all social groups in the same way. None the less, violence destabilises democracy as a whole.

8. In this respect, whilst adequate responses must be provided, they must none the less be particularly balanced, so as not to exaggerate the relative scale of the problem in school environments throughout the Council of Europe member states.

9. Violence at school is not a new phenomenon, but it would appear that it has changed considerably in nature over recent years, particularly on account of the school environment’s growing inability to isolate itself from the tensions and difficulties of all kinds that characterise society in general, and the local communities in which schools are located in particular.

10. Violence at school covers incidents that differ enormously, ranging from minor incidents to very serious cases: all of them must be dealt with appropriately. Particular attention should be given to issues related to gender.

11. There is a wide diversity of situations in the member states, in terms of the forms that school violence takes and its context and causes. None the less, a very broad consensus has emerged on the need to implement local partnerships, the arrangements for which should of course be adapted to individual situations.

12. It seems that some basic guidelines should be emphasised, namely:

- violence prevention is a key aspect of education for democratic citizenship (tolerance and intercultural dialogue, gender equality, human rights, peaceful resolution of conflicts, human dignity, non-violence);
- young people should be seen as players and key partners in any activity in this area;
- mechanisms should exist for taking action even before violence occurs, by raising awareness among all the parties concerned and through preventative work;
- rapid and proportional reaction mechanisms should be available where such phenomena do appear;
- all parties must recognise the need to act and these parties should step up their active role;
- exchange and dialogue should be developed at all levels within communities, but also between them, especially at European level;
- priority should be given to protection and care of victims;
- support to families in their educational role.

Why partnerships?

13. Since the underlying causes of violence at school are partly the result of external phenomena, any action, particularly preventative action, should bring together not only the various elements in the education system but also all the players from the local community.

14. Consequently, the development of partnerships is a precondition for the short-, medium- and long-term effectiveness of prevention work, and represents clear

added value in comparison with any action, however laudable, that may be implemented separately by each of the parties.

15. Violence has an enormous social cost, which requires that preventative action be taken with a view to reducing its frequency in a tangible way.

16. The principle of partnership, whilst not necessarily calling into question the powers and specific rules applicable to each of the parties, does imply de-compartmentalisation and the establishment of cross-disciplinary ties between the parties or services concerned.

17. Generally speaking, the concept of partnership in preventing violence is also the key element of any activity for this purpose in a democratic context that respects the fundamental values that unite the Council of Europe's member states. Accordingly, building partnerships is a contribution to the harmonious functioning of democratic institutions.

Who are the partners?

18. Naturally, the very diverse range of national, regional or local situations must be taken into account; nevertheless, we consider that it would be appropriate to take account of the following partners, in different ways and to varying degrees:

- the school community, in all its forms, especially teachers and their organisations, administrative and managerial bodies, social and medical services and all non-teaching staff. Particular attention should be given to the role of pupils, including very young pupils, parents and their representatives;
- the local and regional authorities and their various specialised services, particularly those involved in preventing violence in general, the social services, the police, services of regional planning, cultural activities, etc.;
- all youth organisations, formal or informal;
- representatives of civil society, especially non-governmental organisations involved in cultural activities, non-formal education, or violence prevention that focuses on certain groups or districts and of faith communities;
- the social, economic and political worlds in general;
- the media, in particular local and regional media;
- representatives of social research circles, from academia or specific structures;
- the national authorities involved in policies on education, youth, culture, social and economic issues, health, justice and law-enforcement, regional planning and urban policy, and especially their decentralised services at local level.

Elements to be considered in drawing up local strategies for awareness-raising, prevention and appropriate reaction

19. While it is clear that, all too often, moves to introduce such strategies are a reaction to the emergence of visible incidents of violence, it would in future be appropriate to establish such prevention-oriented initiatives before serious incidents occur, or incidents that are less acute but repeated.

20. It must be emphasised that any strategy in this area consists primarily of launching a process that will necessarily develop, rather than establishing formal structures, although the latter are obviously necessary. Accordingly, it is important to design such strategies in the long-term.

21. In this respect, assessment of the climate in schools and in the community as a whole is essential. An analysis, bringing together all the partners on the basis of local circumstances, should be carried out to determine, pragmatically but comprehensively, the various phenomena existing in the local community that might lead to the development of violence.

22. It would be appropriate to introduce a system of indicators identifying phenomena with the potential to lead to violence as soon as they appear (early warning systems).

23. Places or fora for sharing information, awareness-raising, identifying common objectives, evaluation and monitoring the situation should be established. Nevertheless, considerable flexibility should be maintained, in order to be able to adapt quickly to changes in the local community or to newly-revealed problems.

24. Where a phenomenon with the potential to generate violence is identified, or where violent incidents are observed, there should be a rapid reaction, particularly:

- support for potential or confirmed victims, encouraging them to express themselves and helping to guarantee a return to a sense of personal balance;
- there should be a clear reminder of the rules for the perpetrators of violent acts, together with balanced and appropriate punishment that is specifically focused on repairing harm and recognising what one has done, and the implementation of educational measures;
- action should be taken to address the underlying phenomena that lead to the emergence of visible violence. This is the area in which the role of the community at large is particularly important.

25. In implementing any prevention strategy, it is appropriate to have a clear procedure aimed at defining each person's role and responsibility, and the role and responsibility of the community as a whole. In this respect, any prevention strategy should be conducted in a context of democratic dialogue that respects the players' cultural, economic and sociological diversity. Clear co-ordination of activities is needed, in order to avoid the phenomena of bureaucratisation and conflict of interests. The training

of the protagonists concerned should be included in this process.

26. Developing mediation measures is at the heart of prevention strategies. All the players concerned may, at certain points, assume the role of mediator, nevertheless it would frequently be useful to have a specific body or specific individuals, including young people themselves, appointed to listen and to intervene in the capacity of mediators.

In concluding their discussions, the participants wished to make the following recommendations:

A. To Council of Europe member states and signatory states of the European Cultural Convention:

That they:

- take any measures at national level that would be likely to promote and encourage the development of local partnerships for preventing and combating violence at school, particularly through the adoption of a legislative framework that creates favourable conditions, and recognition of the importance given to their development;
- pay particular attention to creating a favourable context for the development of long-term preventative measures;
- adopt appropriate budgetary measures to ensure the introduction and functioning of local partnerships, in full or in part;
- encourage the various ministries and departments concerned at national, regional or local level to participate constructively in local partnerships;
- establish national bodies to monitor the situation at national level and provide assistance or support to local partnerships;
- include the prevention of violence at school in initial and in-service training for educational staff within a multidisciplinary framework;
- give particular attention to the impact of the media regarding violence among young people;
- promote sharing of experience and information as well as dissemination of good practices.

B. To local and regional authorities:

That they:

- integrate the prevention of violence at school in their general programmes for preventing violence in everyday life;
- encourage their various departments to contribute to the establishment of strategies to combat violence at school;
- support the development of prevention strategies, *inter alia* in material and financial terms;

- implement youth policies that incorporate consultation and participation by young people in local and regional democratic life;

- promote the sharing of experience and information as well as dissemination of good practices.

C. To school establishments:

That they:

- play their full role in introducing initiatives, even and especially before any violent incidents occur, also by including violence prevention in the curriculum in an appropriate manner;
- take particular action to develop a favourable climate within schools, by encouraging de-compartmentalisation of the roles and functions of the various internal players in school life;
- encourage the opening-up of schools to the communities in which they are located;
- guarantee the democratic functioning of schools, with particular recognition of the rightful place of pupils and their parents.

D. To youth organisations:

That they:

- contribute their experience and skills to prevention work;
- promote training or awareness-raising activities about prevention, in association with the other local partners;
- work to develop youth policies at local level that will include the youngest groups.

E. To local and regional media:

That they:

- provide balanced coverage and reporting, that not only deals with incidents of violence but also any positive action to prevent violence or increase awareness, considering that this also deserves to be brought to the public's attention;
- contribute to the training of pupils, teachers, parents and the entire educational community in the field of the media and ethics.

F. To the Council of Europe:

That it:

Pursue the work begun at this conference, particularly through the:

- publication and wide dissemination of the conference report and this Final Declaration;
- rapid preparation of a handbook on the implementation of strategies to prevent violence at school, on the basis of the conclusions set out above, and including a number of specific examples of good practice;

- completion of training modules for the parties concerned, particularly teachers, youth leaders, parents and the various local players;
- preparation of a draft recommendation by the Committee of Ministers on partnerships for the prevention of violence at school, bringing together the three bodies involved in organising this conference;
- inclusion of the specific elements involved in preventing violence at school in the general conclusions that are to be adopted at the close of the Integrated Project 2 “Reponses to Violence in Everyday Life in a Democratic Society”, particularly with regard to the implementation of general prevention policies;
- recognition of the role of education in developing networks of observatories of violence in everyday life, as part of the Integrated Project;

- continuation of the work already begun in the area of the media and violence, particularly as regards material targeted at young people (media education, ethical guidelines, media impact on behaviours);
- organisation of specific activities in this field taking into account the particular features of different European countries or regions (especially South-eastern Europe);
- strengthening of working relationships with other international organisations (for example, Unesco and Unicef) to develop synergies in particular for the dissemination of experience and good practices and the analysis of causes of violence at school.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 21 May 2003 and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 22 May 2003 (see Document CPL (10) 6, draft resolution presented by Mrs B. Fäldt, rapporteur).