

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

REGIONAL CONSULTATION MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



United Nations Secretary-General's Study
on Violence against Children

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This is one of a series of booklets reporting on the regional consultations organized to contribute to the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children.

In preparation for the meetings, all the regions researched the situation in their region and prepared a compilation and analysis of concluding observations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child to country reports submitted by States Party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Governments and others also provided information on programmes and projects designed to prevent violence against children, protect them and support those who had fallen victim to it. Governments additionally completed a questionnaire designed to elicit information on the legal frameworks in place to protect children from violence and sanction those responsible for it. Public submissions were sought and input from civil society organizations taken into account. Also, a number of countries held national consultations to prepare for the regional meeting and in many cases the national groups put in place mechanisms to continue efforts to combat violence against children as the Study process continues.

All this preparatory work allowed a clearer picture to be gained not only of what already exists in the areas of protection of children, prevention of violence and support to victims, but also where gaps and challenges remain.

In each region, the participants in the consultation – including children and young people themselves – developed an outcome document that in most cases was both a statement of intent and also a practical indication of actions that need to be taken. In some regions, countries also developed specific national action plans that they undertook to implement as a matter of priority.

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The full reports of the consultations, the background materials prepared for the meetings including government's completed questionnaires, the statements of the children and young people and the outcome documents are available on the Study website: www.violencestudy.org. Documents relating to the meeting can also be found at: www.atfal.org/default.aspx, which also contains other child rights-focused information.

This report contains highlights of the regional consultations and summarizes the background information prepared. Sources and references are to be found in the original materials.

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the UN Study Secretariat or the regional consultation partners concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The Middle East and North Africa regional consultation

The Middle East and North Africa regional consultation on Violence against Children was much more than a meeting: it was an eight-month long process of discussion and exchange that reached into all sections of society in this diverse region.

The process was coordinated by a regional steering committee chaired by Egypt's National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM). UNICEF, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Secretariat for the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children and the Arab Council for Childhood and Development were among those that supported the process. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the World Bank, the NGO Coalition on Child Rights and Save the Children also contributed. Comments were received from members of the public through an on-line discussion, and there was a meeting with children and young people to seek out their views.

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Governments in the region completed the questionnaire that had been sent to all United Nations Member States and that were analysed in preparation for the regional consultation meeting that was held in Cairo in July 2005. The resulting report was based on replies to the questionnaire from nine countries: Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Qatar, Kuwait, Morocco, Algeria and Palestine.

At the regional meeting, government representatives, regional and national civil society groups, activists and media professionals were able to discuss in detail the results of the rich process that had been put in place and develop recommendations for consideration as the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence is prepared.

H.E. Ambassador Moushira Khattab, Secretary-General of the NCCM and Vice-chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, opened the meeting. She was joined by Ms Rima Salah, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and by Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, the Independent Expert appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General to lead the Study on Violence against Children.

Professor Pinheiro stressed the importance of attacking violence against children on all fronts. "It is clear," he said, "that to effectively respond to violence against children, we have to implement economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights in a comprehensive manner and without discrimination

on any grounds". Violence against children does not exist in isolation from the rest of children's experiences, and has an enormous impact on a child's overall development. To develop with dignity, every girl and boy must have her/his rights completely respected and ensured. Any form of violence can undermine a child's development and is a violation of those rights.

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Statements made during the opening session of the regional consultation meeting stressed the importance of government commitment to tackling violence against children in all its forms and wherever it happens. The efforts of governments in the region to review national laws and introduce legislation to bring those laws into line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was applauded. It was also

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asserted, however, that more has to be done to enforce those laws and to set up the structures and mechanisms that are needed to make them a practical reality.

A number of themes specific to this region were considered. While the overall framework for the discussions were the ‘settings’ in which violence in children occurs – in the home and family, in school, in institutions, in the community and workplaces – the themes reflected issues that are of particular importance to the region and that broke new ground in the discussions.

It is necessary to touch upon the grim reality of today’s world, including armed conflicts and terrorism, in order to better understand the global context, situation and conditions in which children live and how these affect their vulnerability to violence.

For many of the children of the Middle East and North Africa, the violence of armed conflict is a daily reality. The Study on Violence against Children will not focus on this aspect of violence, in order not to repeat work done on children and conflict at the request of the United Nations Secretary-General by Ms Graça Machel. Nevertheless, as Professor

Pinheiro pointed out, it is necessary to touch upon the grim reality of today’s world, including armed conflicts and terrorism, in order to better understand the global context, situation and conditions in which children live and how these affect their vulnerability to violence.

While conflict in Sudan, Iraq, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Algeria have in many ways held back progress for children, in other ways progress in the region has exposed children to new vehicles for violence. The opportunity could not be missed to discuss these as a region for the first time. The private sector representatives at the meeting particularly welcomed the opportunity to look at the role they can play in promoting safety on-line, and protecting children from violence brought into their lives through abuse of the Internet.

The region’s media had shown a lively interest in preparations for the consultation, and so the role of the media in protecting children from violence was also on the agenda. Discussions centred on the role the media play in promoting some patterns of violence and what media can do to reinforce protective relationships for children. Giving children a voice through the media and raising issues where there are often barriers of taboo and fear were seen as important functions for the media to fulfil.

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More than 600 people participated over the three days of the meeting. Active also were 27 young people's representatives from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Yemen, Qatar, Bahrain, Algeria and Sudan.

The children came from a wide range of economic, social, cultural and educational backgrounds. Their voices were loud and clear. They said that violence, regardless of the form it takes, will no longer be

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tolerated. They spoke of their concerns that, even where laws and policies against violence exist, the means of enforcing them are weak. The children called for appropriate child-sensitive measures to support children in reporting violence to the authorities. They emphasized the importance of knowledge and understanding so that children, families and others who have a care-taker role towards children, for example in schools and institutions, can better fulfil their role in protecting them from violence. Across the region, they said, people are too tolerant of violence; they called on the media to use their power to help people to understand that violence is unacceptable.

The children and young people's recommendations were incorporated into the general recommendations adopted by the participants. The children also, however, looked specifically at how children and young people can be involved themselves in putting and end to violence against children:

On violence in the home and family:

- Reach out to families and raise their awareness;
- Instil and disseminate a culture of dialogue and respect for the views of others;
- Establish websites for the exchange of problems and try to solve them by participating in chat.

On violence in schools:

- Form a small-scale committee for each school year, to be presided over by children, to detect causes of violence from pupils and teachers. At the end of each month, all school children convene and discuss these causes in order to submit them to the competent official and to try and find appropriate solutions;

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- Involve children in seminars on violence against children, in order to raise their awareness of its causes and harm;
- Hold discussions during school days and launch awareness campaigns in order to detect causes and find solutions;
- Set up complaints boxes in schools, associations and clubs to receive children's complaints and submit them to officials to find appropriate responses;
- Set up a statute that awards encouragement prizes to distinguished pupils;
- Organize a unified children's march through the Arab nations to ministries of education to curb the phenomenon of violence in schools;
- Establish a permanent committee in the school to monitor teachers and gather information and data on the teachers that practice violence and take decisions to prohibit them by holding them accountable and improve the communication between the teacher and pupil to stop the violence.

On violence in institutions and alternative care:

- Organize excursions for children in institutions;
- Collect charitable contributions and give gifts to children;
- Raise the issue of violence in institutions in the children's parliament, children's organizations or children's clubs, and hold discussion sessions with members of government;
- Make a complaints box for children in institutions and designate people for its supervision;
- Make a permanent committee of children in institutions to help each other (inclusive of children in institutions and others).

On violence in the community and on the streets:

- Prepare reports by children and specialists and submit them to officials;
- Carry out studies and research on children's conditions;
- Place complaints boxes under surveillance and despatch complaints to specialized and concerned authorities;
- Promote solidarity among Arab children in exchanging expertise and experience, and seeking to make all that happen in their countries.

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The children emphasized, also, the importance of partnerships in combating violence against children. While there are often calls for children to be included more regularly in discussions and decisions affecting them, the children recognized also that they cannot act alone without adult cooperation. Together, children and adults can make a difference. “We, as children,” they said, “do not have the power to realize our hopes and those of thousands and rather millions of Arab children to prevent acts of violence against us. Therefore, we wish to confirm the importance of our partnership with you”.

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Violence against children in the Middle East and North Africa

Participants at the consultation heard that violence against children is common and constitutes a problem throughout the Middle East and North Africa and takes many forms. Research to date has tended to focus on specific kinds of violence in limited geographical areas and as a result it is not possible to know the full scope of the problem. Data are always difficult to collect on such a complex issue as violence against children.

It is possible to collect data, for example, on the number of children who are treated in clinics or hospitals for the results of physical violence (although even then, health workers may not record how an injury was inflicted or may be reluctant to be seen to accuse the person who did it, especially if that person is a member of the child’s family). It is possible to scan police records and find traces of the children who pass through the law enforcement system as victims of violence or as indeed as perpetrators of violence on others. But, in general, most violence against children remains hidden away inside the family circle, in the confines of the school, or in the hearts and minds of the many people who know that a child is being harmed but who ignore it or even accept it.

Because of a general acceptance of some forms of violence and a fear of throwing light on others, there is great reluctance to talk publicly about violence against children. As a result, information is often incomplete and, even where data are collected or surveys undertaken, people may not reveal all they know or think. One

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promising sign in recent times, however, has been the readiness of the various media channels in the Middle East and North Africa to bring the issue out into the open and prompt discussion.

As more information comes to light, including from children themselves when they are given an opportunity to speak out, it becomes clear that children face violence of many forms in their daily lives.

In many countries of the Middle East and North Africa, parents and other members of the family who have responsibility for children, use violence as a way of imposing their will or their views on them. They may call this 'discipline' or sometimes 'education', but in reality it is a sign of weakness, an admission that the parent or family member is not able to help the child to learn in ways that do not harm her/him. The Government of Syria, for example, noted in its submission to the Study that violence against children in the home, school and workplace is usually impulsive and emotional, reflecting a loss of control on the part of the person inflicting it.

Beating children, smacking them, shouting at them and humiliating them are certainly harmful. Parents may argue that they were treated like this and it did them no harm, but children say loud and clear that they suffer when they are punished at home. Sometimes they get over that suffering but sometimes it stays with them for a long time. Even where it is short-lived, that is no reason why it should be allowed to happen. No-one would smack an adult who made a mistake or disagreed – why should it be acceptable to smack a child?

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Sometimes violence in the home or inflicted by members of the family circle is hidden not because people accept it but conversely because no-one would accept it if it came to light. This is the case of

children who are sexually abused. They face long-term repercussions of that violence. Not only do they suffer the severe health repercussions of what is essentially rape, they also live with extreme psychological damage that often gets worse as they grow to understand better what has happened to them. They may grow ashamed, feeling that somehow they were to blame, and so retreat from social contact with others. They may find it difficult to trust people because a person they thought they could trust took advantage of that to hurt them. These children will need long-term support and understanding.

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Participants at the regional meeting considered the fact that sexual violence and violence in the guise of discipline also happen in schools and in places where children work. Here, too, violence is inflicted by someone who wants to assert a position of power over the child: a teacher, or an employer or co-worker. As in the case of violence in the family, the child is seen as somehow less important than an adult (who would rarely be treated this way, even by someone in a superior position). The fact that the child is a human being with human rights is simply not considered. For the perpetrators of violence, the child has no rights.

Reports from the region show that some teachers and others in positions of responsibility in schools, colleges, universities and other places of learning beat children, and humiliate them verbally. While children are also subjected to bullying, including physical attacks, from other students, it is overwhelmingly those in a position of authority who inflict violence on them. Most of the countries in the region report that such violence occurs in their schools and a number of them have taken specific actions to try and stop it.

In a number of countries in the region, too, children live and work on the streets. Here they may face the same ‘hierarchical’ violence that occurs in the family and at school. People who use the children to earn money for them, or older children who control them as part of loose or more organized gangs, abuse their position to exploit the children who depend on them. Often this is accompanied by physical violence or humiliating taunts. Children alone on the streets also face the random violence inflicted by those who see the child as an outcast or somehow deviant. This at times includes the police and those whose job is to keep the streets safe.

When they come into conflict with the law, even where they may not have done anything wrong at all, children are also frequently treated badly. They are handled roughly, sometimes beaten or otherwise physically harmed, and are on the receiving end of verbal abuse, accusations and humiliation. Although many countries require that children be held separately from adults in custody, in practice children are locked up with adults and so vulnerable to violence from them, too, especially sexual violence.

Other institutions run by the state or by private organizations that have taken on traditionally state-sponsored roles such as running orphanages or care homes, are also sometimes frightening places for children. While in theory these institutions are designed to care for children, they are often characterized by rigid systems of discipline, the use of violence to subjugate the children, and violence in the form of neglect and deprivation.

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In all these forms of violence, what data are available show that both boys and girls are the victims, although there are often differences in the patterns of violence to which boys and girls are subjected. Young boys, for example, often face beatings at the hands of their fathers who believe that this will somehow help them to ‘become men’. This tends to diminish as the boy gets older – a sad reflection of the fact that, once he fears the child is in a position to retaliate, the father somehow no longer feels it necessary to ‘educate’ the boy.

Girls are particularly severely affected by violence in the guise of ‘traditional’ practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation and honour killings. Girls also face frequent discrimination just because they are girls.

Conversely, girls are often subjected to more violence as they mature, particularly sexual violence. Girls are particularly severely affected, also, by violence in the guise of ‘traditional’ practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM, also called ‘cutting’) and honour killings. Girls also face frequent discrimination just because they are girls,

and this often means that they are denied an education and put at risk of other forms of violence such as neglect, for example by being given less or inferior food to their brothers.

Why does violence occur?

There is no simple explanation of why violence against children occurs. It is not difficult to explain why families and communities face difficult situations: poor economic conditions (long-term or temporary); the impact of conflict and occupation; problems in the family such as marriage break-ups or separation for various reasons, for example. There may also be some sort of ‘trigger’ factor that can spark a violent incident, for example when the breadwinner in the family falls ill or leaves the home. Difficult or crisis situations are particularly likely to give rise to violence when there is ignorance or a lack of understanding of the harm that violence against children does. Children are vulnerable to violence for the same reasons: economic difficulties, family factors, prevalent cultural beliefs, crisis triggers and lack of knowledge of how they might protect themselves or mobilize other means of protection. But children are also vulnerable because they are children: they are expected not to retaliate and to accept violence as part of the adult/child relationship.

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None of these situations and vulnerability factors, however, explains the violence itself. There are other ways of dealing with family difficulties than beating a child. There are other ways of coping with external difficulties than making a child a victim. There are other paths to take when a problem arises, options seem few and tempers are lost. Turning on a child and making her/him suffer is not acceptable and is a sure sign that the person inflicting the violence does not recognize the rights of that child to live free from violence and fear.

What is being done to stop violence against children?

The first step to eliminating violence against children, then, is recognizing the rights of children – all children – and making sure that everyone knows and respects these rights. All the countries in the Middle East and North Africa region have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which outlines all the rights that children have because they are children. In ratifying the CRC, governments promise to bring national laws into line with the Convention so that it is fully integrated into the legislation that each country uses to provide protection for its children and sanctions against those who deny them their rights.

Materials prepared for the regional consultation indicated that there is still much to be done in this regard in the region, although some work has been done in reviewing national legislation and revising it, as well as filling some gaps where legislation was not in place. In Morocco, for example, the Criminal Code explicitly criminalizes violence against children and promotes reporting of it by an exemption that allows doctors and healthcare assistants to override professional confidentiality in cases where a child has been the subject of violence of any kind. In Algeria, provisions of the Constitution aim at protecting children and young people from all forms of physical and psychological violence.

In Lebanon, Tunisia, Yemen and Kuwait, on the other hand, corporal punishment of children by family members is still legally tolerated. Studies in Yemen, for example, suggest that violence is still the most commonly used form of punishment against children in the home. In Kuwait, violence is forbidden but is not considered a crime provided the person inflicting it ‘maintains his limits and is motivated by disciplinary objectives’, however the ‘limits’ are nowhere defined.

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A number of countries have moved to outlaw physical punishment in schools. Kuwait has banned corporal punishment in schools, both government and private, and indeed in all government institutions. Those who break the law are subject to administrative interrogation or trial. In Algeria and Morocco corporal punishment in schools is prohibited in law. Egypt and Lebanon have issued ministerial decrees banning corporal punishment in schools but these have not entered into law.

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Laws relating to the situation of children on the streets generally treat the child as a wrongdoer rather than being oriented towards protection. Many governments have recognized the need for change but point to the lack of resources that means that

children are simply picked up and find themselves in conflict with the law. In Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Sudan, for example, children on the streets are considered vagrants or delinquent. In Sudan the criminal code categorizes a street child as an outcast and permits flogging. In Syria, it is the parents of children found begging on the streets who are punished, since they are deemed to have failed to provide for the child. The maximum punishment is six months imprisonment and a fine. In Egypt, a national strategy for the protection, rehabilitation and reintegration of street children was launched by the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood in 2003. The strategy is rights-based and treats children as victims.

There has been some progress in relation to laws governing children who work. In the United Arab Emirates, for example, where for a number of years there was concern about very young children being used as camel jockeys, the Foreign Minister issued a decree prohibiting participation in camel races for anyone under the age of 15 or lighter than 45 kilos. Those who break this rule can be fined and banned from the sport all together. The Governments of Qatar and Oman have launched campaigns against the trafficking of children from other countries into work as camel jockeys. They have banned the use of children in this form of work completely and set the general minimum age for employment at 18 years.

Every country in the Middle East and North Africa has laws to prohibit the sexual exploitation of children in the context of a ban on prostitution and sexual exploitation in general. There are severe penalties for anyone who helps, encourages or manages interactions that include prostitution. Ministries of mass media also

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have the task of monitoring for pornography and of confiscating anything that contains explicit or implicit pornographic scenes. Most countries also have laws governing rape, although these are generally not specific to children. Where the victim is a minor, the penalties are usually more severe, although a number of countries permit lower penalties if the rapist agrees to marry the girl. Clearly this is not in the best interests of the child nor indeed of the law itself, since it might be seen to promote rape in instances where a man wishes to force an under-age girl into marriage.

Participants in the regional consultation also discussed the issue of forced early marriage, mostly of girls. This is specifically dealt with in the legislation of Egypt, Mauritania and Chad, where it is considered to be a form of sexual exploitation. Few countries have yet put in place adequate laws relating to the trafficking of children into sexual exploitation or labour exploitation more generally. In some countries of the region, girls especially are moved across borders or within a country to work in domestic labour and both boys and girls are exploited in begging.

Despite these outstanding challenges in legislation, many countries have recognized the need to fill gaps in the law, in many cases by passing an over-arching ‘children’s law’ that attempts to cover all the rights guaranteed in the CRC. Sudan, for example, passed a Children’s Law in 2004, specifically referencing the CRC. The Palestinian National Authority prepared a Law of the Child in 2004 but it has not yet been issued because the Official Journal has not been published. Yemen passed the Law of the Yemeni Child in 2002.

Laws only benefit children, however, when they are adequately enforced. This is not just a question of training police and judiciary to implement the laws in a context of understanding children’s rights, it is also a matter of putting in place mechanisms for reporting cases of violence against children. People need to know who to report to and how to do it, and to be confident that they do so in security. In Palestine the Ministry of Social Affairs has produced a brochure calling on people to report violence against children. Often it is the teacher who reports to the school administration when s/he believes a child may be experiencing violence at home.

Few countries, however, have yet put in place child-friendly reporting systems. The consultation heard the example of Morocco, where complaints can be submitted by the children themselves, their families or organizations such as the National Monitor for Children’s Rights. In Qatar, children who have been victims of violence can sue the person who inflicted the violence, and seek financial compensation. The government

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has established a higher council for family affairs to follow up these issues and a Friend of Child Office which receives complaints via a hotline from children or their representatives. The higher council receives complaints in writing or verbally and the complainant bears no direct or indirect costs. In Egypt, the Ministry of Social Affairs operates a hotline for children to report violence when they experience it. The NCCM launched a hotline for children at the closing of the regional consultation, and is working closely with NGOs and line ministries such as the Ministry of Social Solidarity to reach at-risk children with adequate services.

Violence in the home and family

There is widespread use of violence as ‘discipline’ in families in the Middle East and North Africa. ‘Family’ includes not only parents but members of the extended family and indeed others who may be said to part of family life and relations.

A recent Government/UNICEF study indicated, for example, that verbal abuse and insults are the most common forms of violence against children in Syria, with more than 90 per cent of children polled saying they had experienced this. Some 79 per cent of the children reported being beaten. In most cases it is the mother who inflicts the violence. The study also suggested that the severity of the violence is directly related to the number of children in the family and that violence is more common among boys.

In Yemen, too, violence is the most common form of punishment of children in the home. Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council all report violence against children in the home. Research on violence against children in Iran indicates the wide prevalence of physical punishment (48 per cent of children) and psychological punishment (65 per cent).

Some forms of violence that take place in the home or family environment are a result of cultural or traditional practices that discriminate against girl children in particular.

FGM, for example, is practised in a number of countries in the region. It is estimated that at least 90 per cent of women in Sudan, Djibouti and Egypt have been subjected to FGM, while in Yemen the figure is put at 25

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per cent. Although most countries have banned the practice, FGM continues because of widespread adherence to it as part of cultural heritage, beliefs that it enhances the marriage prospects of a girl and that it is integral to social status. A ministerial decree from the Egyptian Minister of Health in 1996 specifically banned the practice of FGM in hospitals and public and private clinics. The practice continues, however, and is often performed by individual practitioners.

In Yemen, FGM is done in the first weeks of a girl's life and is based on the conviction that it is a *sunna* recommended by the Prophet. In 2001 the Minister of Health issued a decree banning the practice by all public and private health workers, and Yemen also attempts to eliminate FGM as part of the Girls' Health project in a number of governorates.

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Sudan was among the first countries to attempt to address FGM. Despite attempts to outlaw it, however, FGM continues unabated: some 89 per cent of married women between the ages of 15 and 49 have undergone cutting, with the Muslim population recording twice the rate of the non-Muslim population. In Palestine, too, FGM is widespread. Despite official statements that it is not common in Palestinian society, interviews with midwives in the Gaza Strip indicate that each of them carries out procedures on between 10 and 15 girls a month.

Early marriage is also a common practice throughout the region. While Libya has set the legal age for marriage at 20, Algeria at 19, and Djibouti, Palestine, Morocco and Jordan at 18, in most countries the legal age of marriage is low – in Sudan, for example, the minimum age for marriage of both boys and girls is 10 years. Additionally, in countries where Shari'a law has not been standardized, there is a high likelihood that communities will interpret and apply the law differently. In such countries, for example Qatar and Saudi Arabia, there is generally no legally defined minimum age for marriage.

In a number of countries, the age at which a woman can marry is set lower than that for men. In Syria, it is 18 for boys and 17 for girls; in Egypt 18 for boys and 16 for girls; Kuwait has set the legal age at 17 for boys and 15 for girls.

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Girls who are married off at a young age invariably miss out on an education. They are often expected to produce children early in the marriage and this can have serious consequences for their health. Early marriage also contributes to sustaining the cycle of poverty, as young women cannot contribute fully to development and public life, and indications are that it contributes to a high divorce rate.

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The emphasis in many countries on marrying girls off when they are very young is often attributed to concerns that the girl may mature sexually before she marries and may risk bringing shame on the family, and indeed damaging her marriage prospects, by pre-marital sexual activity. This association of

Although it is known to occur, 'honour killing' is rarely talked about and is hidden away in the depths of community 'secrets'. Jordan has been one of the few countries to have prompted public debate on this issue and to have attempted to address it. Statistics there suggest that some 25 young women are killed every year in honour crimes, one-third of all reported murder cases. Many more young women seek refuge in police stations in fear of their lives.

It is rare for those who commit honour killings to be brought to justice and, when they are, the penalties are often low. In Kuwait, for example, a husband who kills his wife because of adultery faces a maximum jail sentence of three years and a fine, or both. The crime is categorized as 'honour crime' rather than murder. Qatar and Algeria are unique in the Middle East and North Africa in having legislation that does not have provisions recognizing honour crimes as somehow different or lesser to other violent crimes. The Qatari Criminal Code also does not acknowledge the concept of provocation in cases of murder.

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Violence in schools

The consultation heard that violence in schools is widespread in the Middle East and North Africa, even in countries where it has been prohibited, for example Egypt, Morocco and Algeria. It can range from verbal abuse to severe beatings, but also takes more ‘hidden’ forms such as when a teacher gives a student poor marks as a form of punishment.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has expressed its concern about the wide use of corporal punishment in the region’s schools, even where it is officially banned. It has called for action to be taken to make teachers and others aware of the negative consequences of violence against children, and to train teachers and other care-takers to avoid violence and to identify and report cases that they encounter.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has expressed its concern about the wide use of corporal punishment in the region’s schools and has called for action to be taken to make teachers and others aware of the negative consequences of violence against children.

The Syrian Government reported in its questionnaire that in Syrian schools the most prevalent form of violence is that inflicted on students by teachers and administrative personnel. In general, psychological violence is the most prevalent form of ‘discipline’ used, as teachers insult students and humiliate them, but beatings are also frequent. Such violence is inflicted as early as pre-school and continues right through to tertiary institutions. There is also some violence among students and bullying can be verbal or physical.

Reports on school violence in Yemen suggest that violence among students is directly related to weak school management. Very few schools have written codes of behaviour and most schools do not deal with violence among students when it does happen. Students who ask a teacher for help when they are bullied often receive little support and rarely is the school social worker brought in. It is not surprising, therefore, that violence at school is one of the most frequently cited reasons for children dropping out of school. Children say they are beaten with sticks, shouted at and made to stand for extended periods. Sexual harassment by teachers is also frequent and affects mostly female students. All this despite a 2001 ban on corporal punishment in Yemeni schools and by-laws outlining permissible punitive measures.

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Syria and Yemen are not the only countries where school violence is a serious problem. In Lebanon, despite a ministerial decree banning corporal punishment in schools, the practice is still allowed in law and continues, especially in government schools. In Palestinian schools, corporal punishment is regularly used, as it is in Iran, where students report that children from poor backgrounds are particularly targeted.

Violence in institutions

The regime of violent punishment exists also in care institutions, where children are similarly subjected to violence when they make a mistake or are seen to require correction. The most prevalent method of punishment is beating with a stick, and it is teachers, supervisors, guards and social workers who inflict the violence.

Children rarely complain because they are afraid that they will be punished for complaining, too. Even if they do, such complaints often fall on deaf ears because violence in the guise of punishment is so widely accepted. It is not uncommon for children to run away from care institutions to escape the harsh regime imposed on them there.

In punitive institutions, too, children are subjected to violence as discipline but also because they are seen to 'deserve' it. A 2004 report on rehabilitation institutions in Damascus, Syria, indicated that a high percentage of children are subjected to different forms of psychological and physical violence, including sexual violence. The living conditions and services were also reported to be poor.

Children admitted to punitive institutions have not necessarily done anything wrong. They may be sent to such institutions because no alternatives exist. In Yemen, for example, children who have been sexually abused in the home may find themselves in a reform institution because they have been removed from the family and admitted to the justice system. Reports show that they are at risk there of sexual abuse by guards and teachers as well as older children.

A Human Rights Watch report on children in conflict with the law in Egypt documented violence against children during arrest or transfer to custodial institutions. Often the children were transferred with adults who also subjected them to violence, including sexual violence.

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Sexual violence is increasingly becoming the focus of concerns in the Middle East and North Africa. Children may be subject to it not only in institutions but also in the family, school and workplace. Children are also exploited in prostitution, and there are links between sexual abuse and the vulnerability of a child to exploitation, particularly if the child runs away from the abuse and has no means to survive.

Prostitution is illegal in all the countries of the region, as is the production of pornographic materials. Despite this, there are growing concerns that children are exploited for sexual purposes. Reports of an increase in sex tourism in Morocco, for example, point to increased vulnerability of young people to those who wish to exploit their vulnerability for profit. Children are also trafficked out of Morocco into the countries of southern Europe for both sexual and labour exploitation.

A 2003 report on trafficking of children in North Africa concluded that children are mostly trafficked into labour exploitation, particularly into child domestic labour. Children are also trafficked domestically and cross-border for the purposes of begging. All children who have been trafficked are doubly vulnerable to violence; they face not only the violence inherent in the work they do and the conditions in which they do it, but also violence at the hands of traffickers and intermediaries and indeed law enforcement personnel who classify them as illegal workers.

Violence in the community

Materials prepared for the regional consultation included information on children who live and work on the streets under the heading ‘in the community’. Violence against such children takes a number of different forms: it may result from arguments or fights, sometimes a reflection of the patterns of behaviour that regulate street life, where hierarchies are imposed by force and tensions arise as groups and individuals compete for ‘position’ and also for scarce resources. For girls, these fights for supremacy often put them at risk of sexual abuse. They are at risk of sexual violence also from others who see children living and working on the streets as easy targets for violence.

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A report submitted to the Regional Forum for the Protection and Support of Street Children in 2004 noted that more and more children seem to be taking to the streets and that many of them arrive after escaping physical and sexual violence at home. Poverty is also a factor, as parents may urge a child to leave home and find work to help the family. Young children, especially, will have no experience or qualifications and are most likely to find casual work on the streets, where they are vulnerable to exploitation and violence.

There are very few services for children who find themselves on the streets. On the contrary, most countries' laws treat the children as deviant or vagrant and punish them even where they have done nothing wrong at all.

There are very few services for children who find themselves on the streets. On the contrary, most countries' laws treat the children as deviant or vagrant and punish them even where they have done nothing wrong at all. In Egypt, for example, anyone under the age of 18 who does not have a permanent shelter to live in or a legal source of income is classified as

potentially deviant and can be arrested. In Jordan and Lebanon, the law describes child beggars as deviant.

It is impossible to consider community-level violence in this region without taking into account the impact of conflict and occupation on children, their families and the communities they live in. Since the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000, for example, hundreds of Palestinian children have been killed and thousands more injured. Between September 2000 and January 2004, 3,018 children were wounded -- 45 per cent by rubber bullets and 55 per cent by live ammunition.

Children are also subjected to detention and interrogation by the Israeli authorities despite the fact that the Palestinian security forces do not include anyone below the age of 18, so any children detained cannot be considered combatants. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has expressed its concern that, while Israeli children are deemed to be children up to the age of 18, Palestinian children are subject to Israeli military law that allows them to be detained as young as 12 and treated as adults when they reach 16. The Committee has also expressed concern that the Israeli authorities use torture to interrogate Palestinian children.

This violence is compounded by the violence that arises when communities break down or are dismantled by force. House demolitions, the death of the family breadwinner, men's increasing sense of frustration as a result

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of exceedingly high unemployment and restricted mobility all contribute to a context where domestic and communal violence are nurtured. The Gaza Community Mental Health Programme has reported that men who are detained and subjected to torture frequently return home and use violence as a means of imposing their dominance on their wives and children. In short, in the face of armed conflict or occupation, the level of violence tends to rise, not only in the community but in the heart of the family.

Violence in workplaces

Children who enter work early and who are considered to be in child labour (because of their age or the hazardous nature of the work they do) are at risk of violence as well as labour exploitation. Because they are working outside or on the fringes of the law, these children are especially vulnerable to being manipulated and harmed by those who seek to make money from them. This includes both employers and clients – children report, for example, that often when they are selling small goods on the streets, people will drive up in their cars, take the goods and drive away without paying. Children who need to earn money to survive, or to help their families, are regularly threatened by employers who say they will report them to the police. The children are beaten if they do not earn enough money or to keep them compliant. Passers-by often verbally abuse them. Authorities may handle them roughly.

When they reach the legal minimum working age, young children are still at risk just because they are young and, understandably, inexperienced. They are beaten by bosses and co-workers if they make mistakes or do not work fast or well enough. They may be harassed, especially girls. Invariably, too, throughout the region children who are working do not enjoy the labour rights that other workers do. They are often badly paid and are sometimes not paid at all.

This is particularly the case of both boys and girls who work in domestic service. Many children are sent into child domestic labour not only because their parents hope to receive some income from the child's labour, but because the family is relieved of the 'burden' of housing and feeding the child. Many parents explain their decision to send a girl, especially, into domestic service as 'education', claiming that the girl will learn valuable skills that will serve her well when she marries.

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In reality, children in domestic labour are not only frequently exploited – working long hours for little or no pay, subjected to hazardous conditions and expected to do tasks way beyond their abilities – they are also at very high risk of violence. Hidden behind the doors of an employer's home, children in domestic labour or even those of legal working age and indeed their adult equivalents, are beaten, burned and humiliated not only by the adults of the family but often by the children too, and even by other domestic helpers.

In most countries, both girls and boys are taken on as domestic helpers, although for different kinds of work. While girls do household jobs, boys more regularly work in the family business, do agricultural work, look after the animals or do chores in the yard. In most countries, too, boys are 'let go' as they get older whereas girls tend to stay in domestic labour so that, by the time they are in their early teens, girls outnumber boys of the same age in domestic service. Adolescent girls face increased risks not only of sexual violence at the hands of male members of the employers' household but also violent punishment from the women of the house who hold them responsible for the men's behaviour.

Children work in domestic labour in many countries in the region. In Morocco girls working in domestic service are known as 'petites bonnes', a pleasant title that hides the violent nature of the situation in which Moroccan girls as young as six or seven can find themselves. Morocco is not the only country in the region where such young children work in domestic servitude, however. It is common throughout the region and, indeed, in some of the wealthier countries, including the Gulf States, children are brought in from poorer countries to work in domestic service. These children come from other Middle Eastern countries but also from South Asia, for example Sri Lanka.

Children from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have also traditionally been brought into the region to work as camel jockeys in the camel races of Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates. In recent years international campaigns to end this have resulted in government action to legislate against this dangerous practice.

Actions to end violence and protect children

Throughout the region, in addition to government actions at legislative and policy level, civil society organizations and academic institutions have begun to address violence against children as part of the broader child rights agenda.

In Syria, for example, women's organizations and university researchers have been documenting violence against children with a view to developing programmes and raising awareness on the issue. Legal aid is offered to children who have been subjected to violence. Organizations in Yemen, too, are making efforts to study the problem and attempt to identify the scope of it so that they can develop programmes on the basis of a clear understanding of the needs and of gaps that need to be filled. Civil society organizations in this country have begun organizing training workshops to help those within the judiciary to deal with children who come into conflict with the law, and the government subsidizes the development of similar training workshops for parents, school directors, religious leaders and local council officials.

In Algeria, 47 NGOs have joined in a coalition that aims to protect children from violence. They provide care for victims and work on projects to promote peace. To do this, they have held awareness-raising meetings and distributed leaflets advocating for the rights of the child. In Algeria, as in some other countries in the region such as Morocco, children who have experienced violence are taken on holiday camps to give them a chance to relax, enjoy themselves and begin the long road to recovery.

There are also a number of initiatives across the region aimed at the elimination of FGM. In both Yemen (2001) and Egypt (1996), the Minister of Health issued a decree banning the practice by all public and private health workers. Also in Egypt, a national project on 'FGM free villages' was established, which proved to be successful in changing attitudes towards FGM.

The Egyptian Government noted in its reply to the Study questionnaire that NGOs in that country are active in identifying cases of violence against children and helping victims to rebuild. Such initiatives, though, are few and far between, and this is a common problem in the region: where good initiatives do exist, they are generally very small in scope and there are few attempts to scale up the lessons and experience.

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It is vital that NGOs and others working to eliminate violence and protect children from it be encouraged and supported to evaluate the efficacy of their work, draw lessons from it, and use these to expand good programming.

For this to happen, it is vital that NGOs and others working to eliminate violence and protect children from it be encouraged and supported to evaluate the impact of their work, draw lessons from it, and use these to expand good programming across the country and indeed region. Identifying and sharing good practice and continuing the learning process are vital;

where this is not done, the impact of good work will remain piecemeal and children will fall through the cracks.

As programmes are evaluated and lessons are learned, it is also important to include children in the process. To date it is clear that few resources have been devoted to child participation. In Egypt, groups of boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 18 have been formed in eight governorates and trained on needs assessment, documentation and planning. In Tunisia, schools have student councils with deputies in each class and children are able to use these to have their views represented. They also play the role of lawyers for children who have been exposed to violence.

In Palestine, UNICEF and the Ministry of Education have launched a programme to reduce violence and promote non-violent problem solving, and children are partners in this process from planning through to evaluation. The Ministry of Social Affairs has produced educational materials aimed at helping children to identify harassment and to know what steps they can take if they are subjected to violence.

Although in a number of countries governments have reinforced legal provisions to reduce violence against children, enforcing these remains a challenge. Few countries have put in place adequate systems for reporting instances where the law/regulation is broken and, in any case, few people are aware that the prohibitions exist. Algeria's Ministry of National Education took an important step in forming a national committee of representatives of different sectors and civil society organizations working with children, along with parents' associations. The committee has a branch in every governorate and oversees implementation of a national programme promoting a culture of peace and rejecting violence in schools.

Little work has been done to regulate and monitor care-providing institutions, although work is beginning to gather information and set minimum standards. A 2005 research report in Jordan, for example, pointed to

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the need for a manual of rights and standards for such institutions and the need for complaint systems so that violence against children can be reported.

In terms of services and systems available for children who have fallen victim to violence, who may be at risk or who are emerging from violent incidents, there have been a number of initiatives. Tunisia has a Child Protection Representative to whom children and their families can turn if the child faces violence but very few countries yet have systems in place for reporting and monitoring cases of violence against children. The use of hotlines and drop-in centres has been piloted in some countries and is an important initiative in places where children have access to the phone or can get to a centre. During the regional consultation, H.E. Suzanne Mubarak, Egypt's First Lady, launched a hotline for the reporting of violence against children in that country.

Gaps and challenges

There is still, clearly, however, much to be done. A first priority is to fill legislative gaps to bring all national laws into line with CRC. In the process, anomalies between the treatment meted out to girls and boys under the law should also be addressed. Beyond this, however, there is an urgent need for better enforcement of the law on behalf of children. In many countries in the region, children are too often treated as objects rather than subjects of the law. Police, judiciary and legal support staff must understand the rights of children and their role in protecting and ensuring those rights.

The regional meeting underlined the importance of building all initiatives on the basis of a thorough understanding of the scope and nature of the issue of violence against children. Although awareness is growing of the problem of violence against children and the importance of ensuring children's rights, there is an urgent need for more reliable research as a basis for programming, priority setting and awareness raising. Gaps in data must be filled and used as a basis for information exchange at national and regional levels. It will be important, in this regard, to continue to refine research tools. Since violence against children is so often a 'hidden' phenomenon, occurring in settings that researchers cannot easily penetrate, consideration needs to be given to alternative sources of information – for example hospitals and clinics, schools and through peer informant measures – and to collecting information in the context of other processes, for example through census exercises.

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There is a clear need to send out unequivocal messages that violence must not be used as a form of discipline in any setting, even where it may be ‘traditional’, and that violence against children, whatever form it takes, will not be tolerated.

While some work has begun in the areas of awareness raising and education, there is a clear need to send out unequivocal messages that violence must not be used as a form of discipline in any setting, even where it may be ‘traditional’, and that violence against children, whatever form it takes, will not be tolerated. This should begin with signals from government in the form of clear policy statements and rigorous upholding of the law. But if it is to reach into other levels of society – schools, the home, the workplace – it must also be promoted by public and private media, in education and training programmes, through advocacy and awareness raising. The role of religious leaders is important here, and those who have influence in their various professional domains can make a difference: doctors and health workers, for example, are vital in helping new mothers to adopt non-violent means of guiding their children’s behaviour.

There is a clear need for more urgency to be given to advocating against traditional harmful practices such as FGM, early marriage and honour-related violence. State support for actions, including advocacy campaigns, to promote understanding and rejection of such practices is of great importance since it additionally signals the intention of States not to condone such acts or allow them to continue. State support for broader advocacy and awareness raising designed to reduce violence against children is also needed.

As efforts are made to promote understanding of the nature and impact of violence against children, it is important, too, that those who wish to help protect children know what they can do and that there are systems in place to support them. Mechanisms for reporting violence, and follow-up support services for child victims but also for those who wish to protect them, should not only be in place but also accessible and known to all.

The regional meeting noted that States must act urgently to fulfil their commitments to put in place prevention and protection systems, including identifying children who have experienced violence with a view to providing adequate and comprehensive services for their support and rehabilitation.

For all this to function effectively, it will be important to make sure that the human resources, experience and skills needed to deal effectively with managing, detecting and preventing violence are in place. Capacity

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building is important, including for parents, teachers, physicians, police officers, judiciary staff, social workers, psychiatrists and all those dealing with children.

The regional meeting noted that there is still much to be done in exploring and understanding the nature of child participation and the potential that children and young people have to contribute to efforts to eliminate violence, at many levels. The regional meeting noted that the youth representatives present demonstrated their clear understanding of the magnitude and impact of violence, particularly on disadvantaged groups such as disabled children, and offered many ideas on actions that might be undertaken at different levels. The children and young people expressed clearly their view that the CRC remains a framework not only for national legislation but for policy, decisions, strategies and actions to protect children against violence.

Recommendations and next steps

In preparation for the consultation, many countries in the Middle East and North Africa region set up national committees on violence against children. They worked to mobilize people and to prepare children for the meeting. Following the meeting, these committees will follow up on the commitments made by governments in the Cairo Declaration, a statement of determination to act to stop violence, and will support regional initiatives, including working with the media to send out clear signals that violence against children will not be tolerated:

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THE CAIRO DECLARATION

The participants of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Consultation on the UN Study on Violence against Children held in Cairo from 27-29 June 2005

1. **Convey** their utmost gratitude and appreciation to Her Excellency Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, First Lady and Chairperson of the Technical Consultative Committee of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) in the Arab Republic of Egypt, for sponsoring and addressing this important regional conference, and are grateful for the warm hospitality and significant efforts exerted by the technical secretariat of NCCM for the success of its proceedings.

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2. **Express** their appreciation for the preparations undertaken for this conference at the local and regional level marked by the outstanding participation of representatives from governments, civil societies, by children, UN organizations and development partners; consider this event as one which has contributed to raising awareness within countries of the region on violence against children and the necessity to confront this by means of cooperation among all partners. This was translated by the initiative of many countries in the region to establish multidisciplinary national committees for combating violence against children. Also express their appreciation that this event surpassed the Study by establishing the foundation for societal endeavour to seriously address the issue of violence against children.
3. **Commend** the efforts exerted by countries in the region for promoting the rights of the child and protection of children from violence; recognize their commitment to the Convention of the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols indicated by regular submission of reports to the Committee of the Rights of the Child; participants are also aware that more efforts should be exerted to ensure the full implementation of legislations for guaranteeing the rights of the child in its entirety, including the right of protection from violence, maltreatment or exploitation.
4. **Fully aware** of the real problems and constraints confronting the effective implementation of measures to protect children from all forms of violence, including poverty, occupation and armed conflict, participants confirm the need to adopt integrated national action plans based on attainable objectives within a time frame and defined budget, as well as indicators to monitor realized progress, problems and means to overcome them.
5. **While recognizing** that children are citizens and fundamental partners in the democratic process, participants bear in mind that all policies, programmes and mechanisms pertaining to combating violence against children should be in conformity with the principles spelled out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, namely: the best interests of the child, 'non-discrimination', the right to life, survival, development and respect for views of the child and the right of the child to express these views in the family, school, and all institutions; and that due consideration is given to these views when taking decisions; formulating and implementing programmes affecting the child's life .

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6. **Approve** the final recommendations of the MENA Regional Consultation on the UN Study on Violence against Children, which should govern national action for the protection of children from violence.
7. **Commit themselves** in particular to harmonize national laws and legislations in every country with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its Optional Protocols and other relevant international standards; to expedite the preparation of specialized research, statistics with a focus on the necessity to establish disaggregated data base and a situation analysis of the problem.
8. **Also commit themselves** to ensure protection of children from corporal punishment and explicitly prohibit corporal punishment in all settings including in the family, schools and other institutions.
9. While taking pride in the exalted status of divine principals in our value system, which elevates the rights of the child, in particular protection from all forms of violence, yet some abuse these principles as a pretext to commit violence against the child. Equally proud of our customs and traditions which embrace children with care and love, nonetheless there are certain alien practices introduced in our culture that constitutes blatant violence against our sons and daughters. These practices must be banned in compliance with our inherent genuine values and traditions.
10. **While recognizing** the strength of the family institution in the MENA region, participants are aware of the pressures facing the family which can lead to incidence of violence. Since violence starts and ends with the family, therefore the solution lies in the family. Consequently it is imperative that the family be accorded protection and becomes the centre of attention when providing solutions to the problem of violence, namely raising awareness of non-violent means of discipline, and the dissemination of a non-violent societal culture starting with breaking the silence that conceals violence against children
11. **Affirm** the necessity to achieve integration among social prevention mechanisms and legal protection measures, and to review laws and legislation that will ensure reporting on acts of violence, incriminating any neglect in this regard, punishing perpetrators of violence, abandoning impunity, ensuring timely monitoring of violence with the provision of adequate mechanisms for social and legal protection by reaffirming the social responsibility of adults, public and private sector institutions.

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12. **Conscious** that the elimination of violence against children demands building the capacities of children, parents as well as all professionals dealing with children including teachers, social and health workers, experts, along with judiciary and law enforcement sectors, call for increased consultations and exchange of expertise among MENA countries, particularly in the realm of success stories in order to raise awareness; and affirm the protection of marginalized children who are more vulnerable to violence and those suffering from discrimination on multiple grounds including disability, poverty, gender etc.
13. **Affirm** their commitment to establish a follow-up mechanism for the work of the MENA regional consultations on Violence against Children and call upon the organizers to continue their efforts to ensure that countries in the region follow up implementation of the recommendations.
14. **Commit themselves equally** that the issue of violence against children is highly placed as a permanent item on the agenda of the summits of the Arab League, the African Union and the Organization of Islamic Conference.

In her statement to the closing session of the consultation, HE Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, Egypt's First Lady, called upon governments in the region and civil society to address violence as an integral element of the child rights agenda and as a priority that needs to be addressed urgently.

The participants decided that they would meet every year to check progress and to ensure that violence against children remains high on the agenda of all those who can do something to end it. A first meeting was provisionally scheduled for February 2006, in Cairo.

In the meantime, the results of the three days of discussion go forward to the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children in the form of recommendations on the kinds of actions that need to be taken to combat violence in all its forms. The recommendations are in two parts – the first is general cross-cutting recommendations presented in relation to the overall goal they are intended to achieve; the second brings together the recommendations of the various thematic working groups (given here in summary form).

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA FOR THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S STUDY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

PART ONE:

Goal 1: To recognize all forms of violence as negative/criminal behaviour and a violation of children rights

- Review domestic laws and regulations in order to ensure their full conformity with the principles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
- Address legal and enforcement needs to effectively implement the provisions of the CRC.
- Set up family courts and adopt friendly rules in investigations so that children are protected from familial violence.
- Amend existing laws, as a priority, to incriminate the practice of female genital mutilation, imposing harsh punishments on crimes of honour, while ensuring that the appropriate enforcement mechanisms are put in place and operational.
- Enforce relevant legislation and address gaps in laws in order to effectively penalize those who commit violence in any form, including sexual and economic exploitation,
- Prohibit forced child labour in institutions.
- Abolish imposition of capital punishment on all people below the age of 18 and the use of cruel punishments, including corporal punishment on children, in all institutions and settings.
- Enforce relevant legislation, investigate and prosecute perpetrators, ensuring that the child is not victimized in proceedings and that his/her privacy is respected, with special attention to child witnesses or victims of crime.
- Set-up child-sensitive mechanisms to receive, investigate and prosecute complaints against law enforcement officials regarding ill-treatment during arrest, questioning and police custody and in detention centres.

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Goal 2: To promote a conducive and proactive social environment that advocates against violence and promotes effective behavioural changes.

- Recognize children's rights to express their views.
- Facilitate children's involvement in legal proceedings by adopting and implementing child-sensitive special measures, such as videotaped testimonies.
- Set up children's parliaments, councils of children, NGOs etc.
- Take measures to establish, in collaboration with children, peer support mechanisms for children, for example websites and on-line chat for children.
- Involve children in setting standards for accountability, monitoring, reporting and promoting awareness against all forms of violence in all settings.
- Parental training and skills enhancement on sound upbringing, using alternative means of sound upbringing and establishing dialogue with their children.
- Standard setting for protection against violence in all childcare institutions (schools, shelters, correctional facilities, home institutions among others).
- Promote alternative, non-violent practices, including non-violent disciplinary measures, and raise awareness on violence in institutions by publishing informative material on it.
- Establish a mechanism for disseminating research on violence against children in the region.
- Set up a regional inventory for data and studies including published and unpublished material.
- Enhance the role of the Arab League as a regional platform for sharing experiences and advocacy against violence.
- Form a coordination committee from Arab/MENA NGOs to serve as a follow-up mechanism on the role of civil society.
- Conduct a regional study on sexual violence.
- Compile data and intensify studies on violence against children and publish the results.
- The state should make available a tool for data collection on cases of violence against children that are reported, in collaboration with civil society organizations, professional syndicates, and international organizations.
- Conduct a comparative regional study on the mechanisms for reporting.
- Engage in partnerships with the private sector and civil society to address children's rights on a priority basis to enhance the visibility of negative behaviours such as violence.

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- Recognize private sector and civil society representatives for scaling up best practices.
- Make available the necessary access, data and information to support the resources of the private sector and civil society in addressing violence in the various settings.
- Extend the necessary support to community and corporate resources to enhance monitoring and reporting of violence in the various settings.

Public awareness initiatives to bring about behavioural change

- Organize an annual children's march throughout Arab nations to curb the practice of all forms of violence in all settings.
- Recognize proactive leadership in advocating and acting against violence amongst children, adults and institutions.
- Use non-formal education as a good and effective tool to convey messages on violence (including through art, theatre, etc.).
- Organize communication campaigns.

Elimination of violence in ongoing children, family and social support programmes

- Mainstream children's rights, including protection against violence, in planned/ongoing poverty reduction strategies, programmes and interventions.
- Mainstream the child rights agenda in policies, programmes and/or interventions targeting the family.
- Mainstream activities on violence against children in planned/ongoing children's programmes/initiatives.
- Promote the protection of the physical integrity of the child in health and social care programmes.
- Make education compulsory and free for all children including special groups listed below, with the aim of developing mental and spiritual values and moral ethics.
- Introduce alternative pedagogic and educational methodologies, such as socio-psychological intervention in upbringing and education.
- Set up violence detection, monitoring and counselling facilities in communities, schools and institutions that are equipped with trained personnel and ensure a child's right to privacy and protection.

Goal 3: To address the needs of special groups of children

This group includes children who are slow learners and others experiencing learning difficulties, high-risk children including street children, working children, abandoned children and orphans, child refugees and asylum seekers, and those suffering single or multiple disability. The most vulnerable among those are girls and children under the age of five. This group also includes children who have been actually exposed to violence.

- Establish specialized centres or multidisciplinary institutions to provide all children, and particularly child victims of violence, with adequate counselling and recovery services. Appoint social workers to assist children in this respect.
- Make the children more aware of their rights and how they can be enforced.
- Ensure that the child care-giver is aware of children's rights and the mechanisms available for detection and management of any violation.
- Promote support from other children and community members to these special groups.

PART TWO:

On violence in the home and family

- Break the silence and open up channels and mechanisms for reporting and monitoring violent incidents against children or that those witnessing incidents of violence could have access to, while providing the necessary protection for them.
- Improve parental training and skills enhancement on sound upbringing and establishing dialogue with their children.
- Review domestic laws and regulations in order to ensure their full conformity with the principles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Facilitate children's involvement in legal proceedings by adopting and implementing child-sensitive special measures, such as videotaped testimonies.
- Amend existing laws, as a priority, to incriminate the practice of FGM; impose harsh punishments on crimes of honour, while ensuring that the appropriate enforcement mechanisms are put in place and operational.

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- Encourage professionals working with and for children, such as health personnel, to report on child abuse and violence. Build the capacity of professionals working with children eg teachers, paediatricians, police officers, on the means to deal with children from different age groups, including victims of violence.
- Define a unified/consistent means for follow up among different agencies and include a unified set of indicators based upon which child protection in various settings is measured and monitored.
- Take effective measures to prevent discrimination against children and address the situation of children facing multiple forms of discrimination, such as girls with disabilities.
- Establish specialized centres for domestic violence-related issues. Establish specialized centres or multidisciplinary institutions to provide all children, and particularly child victims of violence, with adequate counselling and recovery services. Appoint social workers to assist children with this respect.
- Conduct a regional study on sexual violence and mechanisms for reporting.
- Raise awareness on violence against children, *inter alia*, by organizing awareness-raising seminars, training parents, guardians and professionals working with and for children on the rights of the child, and by activating the role of the media.
- Take measures to establish, in collaboration with children, peer support mechanisms for children, eg websites and on-line chat for children.
- Implement a programme that relies on the use of media and outreach channels including local, religious leaders and academics. Identifying media programmes on the local level and promote children's participation in those programmes.
- Include education programmes on the rights of the children and human rights in the school curriculum, as well as programmes and educational approaches on non-violent conflict resolution.

Children's recommendations:

- Organize awareness raising sessions/seminars to advocate for the importance of childcare.
- Enact laws protecting children from violence at home, especially beating.
- Activate the positive role of the media (audio-visual-print), and mobilize them for education and changing false ideas.

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- Improve the family's social and living standards and take care of the needy because poor economic conditions play a role in creating violent mentalities and psychologies.
- Establish special child courts that decide in cases of violence in the family in the presence of officials to protect the complainant and ensure the rights of the child subject of violence.
- Separate the abuser/ party responsible for the act of violence from the family and provide him/her with psychological treatment forcing him/her to provide income for the family during that period if he/she was the family provider. Provide treatment for the abused (victim) at the same time without separation from the family.
- Organize visits to families by social and psychological specialists to oversee families suffering from regular violence.
- Establish a specialized centre accessible for the child exposed to psychological, corporal, social or sexual violence.
- Appoint a representative for child protection at the local level to receive the complaints of children and attempt to find solutions.

Violence in schools

- Introduce alternative pedagogic and educational methodologies, such as socio-psychological intervention in upbringing and education. Train teachers on the CRC.
- Form a permanent committee in schools to supervise teachers and tutors, collect information and data on teachers applying violence, adopt decisions to stop them and render them accountable, and ensure proper liaison between teachers and pupils to prohibit the use of violence.
- Set up mechanisms for social monitoring in schools; paying heed to the economic status of teachers and improving their working, professional and environmental conditions.
- Enforce relevant legislation to ban the use of violence in schools, investigate and prosecute the perpetrators, ensuring that the child is not victimized in proceedings and that his/her privacy is respected.
- Set-up mechanisms in schools, including child committees and parents' boards, to address the issue of child rights and violence in schools together.

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- Establish accountability standards in the recruitment and performance review of teachers and consult children in this process.
- Reward teachers who promote alternative methods of discipline and child-participatory teaching methods.
- Develop guidelines for the early identification of cases of violence at school.
- Protect children who bring complaints from retaliation.
- Carry out comprehensive studies on violence in schools to better understand the problem and develop programmes to address and monitor the issue. Establish a mechanism for disseminating research on violence against children in the region.
- Create information centres and hotlines dealing with violence in schools.
- Raise awareness of the negative impact of corporal punishment among parents, teachers and other professionals working in schools, and provide capacity building on positive discipline or other alternative methods of resolving conflict peacefully.

Children's recommendations:

- Hold meetings in schools with the participation of pupils and teachers to choose teachers that can participate in solving their problems.
- Prepare a list of alternative non-violent disciplinary measures that is scientifically more positive and effective in punishing or penalizing everyone who uses violence against children.
- Enacting deterrent laws that are capable of abolishing violations committed against pupils.
- Carry out continuous and unannounced visits on behalf of the Ministry of Education by a group of specialists, in order to monitor violence.
- Designate an exploration class for discussing causes, harms and consequences of violence with pupils, and distribute booklets highlighting the causes and harmful consequences of violence in all schools.
- Produce plays on CD and distribute them to all schools to raise the awareness of teachers and pupils on the harm of violence as well as its moral and physical impact on children.

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Violence in institutions and alternative care

- Promote quality assurance standards in childcare institutions and train service providers in these institutions on means and ways of protecting, rehabilitating and devoting care to children. Enhance the role of civil society organizations and entities concerned in detecting and monitoring the protection of children in institutions and encouraging family and foster care systems.
- Correctional facilities for juvenile delinquents must be free from violent practices and torture and an observatory must be founded to monitor the welfare and protection of children in detention or while under interrogation to guarantee that their integrity and rights are secured.
- Abolish imposition of capital punishment on all people less than 18 years of age and the use of cruel punishment, including corporal punishment, in all institutions.
- Conduct assessments of children before their institutionalization and while living in the institution.
- Strengthen coordination between different ministries responsible for issues related to children in institutions.
- Institutions should seek to build and maintain relationships with the communities to which the children will return whenever possible
- Set-up child-sensitive mechanisms to receive, investigate and prosecute complaints against law enforcement officials regarding ill-treatment during arrest, questioning and police custody and in detention centres.
- Establish programmes to support integration of children in their communities in cooperation with their parents
- Pay full attention to the victims of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment, and provide them with adequate compensation, recovery and social reintegration.
- Establish programmes for de-institutionalization and the use of alternative care for children without primary caregivers
- Civil society should play an active role in the promotion and protection of the rights of the children in institutions. Strengthen the role of NGOs in monitoring and advocacy.
- Provide assistance to enable children and their families to be in regular contact when such contact is in the child's best interests.
- Carry out studies and research on violence in institutional settings.

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- Promote alternative, non-violent practices, including non-violent disciplinary measures and awareness on violence in institutions by publishing informative material on it.
- Establish a panel of observers who monitor violence against children in institutions.

Children's recommendations:

- Appoint observers who would carry out unannounced visits and administer strict surveillance on officials within institutions, forcing harsh punishments on violators. Appoint a multidisciplinary team (medical, psychological, social) in institutions, and activate it.
- Render education in institutions compulsory, with the aim of developing mental and spiritual values and moral ethics.
- Enact national and international laws that totally prohibit violence in institutions and appoint institutions/organizations to follow up on the implementation of laws.
- Prohibit the work of children in institutions and provide all the needed services for them to live a normal life.
- Commit institutions to keep a file for each child, in order to follow his/her case, while involving the child in compiling this file by conducting direct interviews with him/her for detection of any maltreatment incidents.
- Carry out artistic and performance works (publications, plays) that raise awareness and reveal the importance of offering help to children in institutions.

Violence in the community and on the streets

- Early detection of vulnerable children before they seek the streets or engage in labour; especially worst forms of labour and provide support services targeting the child and the family.
- Seek other means of care for children deprived of family care, such as specialized social support centres and others.
- Address social and economic problems through government and civil society programmes that take into account the rehabilitation of children in difficult circumstances (street children, working children, victims of sexual abuse and exploitation).
- Develop the role of enforcement officers to assume a more effective social role in the community and in particular in dealing with children.

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- Enforce relevant legislation and address gaps in laws in order to effectively penalize those who perform sexual and economic exploitation.
- Victim support systems should be created. Build shelters for children.
- Establish programmes for special care, psychological rehabilitation, and empowerment of street children. Allocate funds for street children and other disadvantaged groups.
- Enhance the participation of children as a civil society group.
- Regional NGOs should play a role in enhancing networking and the exchange of experience between NGOs in the region.
- Collect data (disaggregated according to gender; age, geographic location etc.) and undertake research and studies on violence against children in the community.
- Enhance the role of the Arab League as a regional platform for sharing experiences and advocacy against violence.

Children's recommendations:

- Raise awareness through audio-visual media and reading materials.
- Develop children's potential and talents in centres, associations etc. and in order to prohibit child labour. Enact a law that prohibits employers from exploiting minor children while intensifying control thereon.
- Provide free schooling and make children's education compulsory, while earmarking a portion of state money for homeless children.
- Apply strict and deterrent laws against those exploiting children in any way (sexually, physically, economically).
- Prohibit wars and spread peace in the MENA region.
- Set up shelters for homeless children and rehabilitate them. Set up special centres for handing out assistance, and prepare programmes for sponsoring orphans and street children, while allowing them to help in running them.

