

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

REGIONAL CONSULTATION LATIN AMERICA



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.

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 Latin America regional consultation

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Family and state institutions are the main settings where Latin American children and adolescents experience violence. This was the main finding of research done to prepare the Latin American regional meeting that was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 31 May to 2 June 2005.

The research also included an analysis of concluding observations from the Committee on the Rights of the Child to national reports submitted in fulfilment of obligations following states' ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Input from government responses to questionnaires submitted to the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children were also taken into account in the background materials for the consultation.

The consultation brought together 300 representatives of ministries, parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, international agencies, children and young people. Their experiences, and the input from national consultation meetings across the region, laid the foundations for an intense discussion of the nature and scope of violence against children in Latin America, what is being done about it and what needs to be done.

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A group of 35 experts on violence in Latin America met in working groups to prepare draft recommendations for the meeting. The meeting's conclusions, in the form of recommendations and a statement of intent (the Buenos Aires Declaration) are an important contribution to the global Study, which will be finalized in 2006.

National consultation meetings were held in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina. Through these meetings, some 2,000 children, organized into 196 focus groups, were able to share their experiences of violence and give their opinions on its effects and what can be done to stop it.

The children and young people emphasized that:

- Girls and female adolescents are most likely to be exposed to sexual violence ranging from harassment to rape;
- Younger boys and girls are particularly vulnerable to violence;
- Adults do not seem to understand that children have rights, including the right to be protected from violence, and accept as normal the use of violence to 'discipline' children and as an expression of 'macho' power;
- Many boys and girls feel that their rights are mostly denied in their own home and by their own family.

The opening speeches at the consultation all underlined the increasing problem of violence in Latin America and the need to protect those who are most at risk from it. The Deputy Executive

Director of UNICEF, Rima Salah, said that violence against children happens for many reasons including as a result of cultural beliefs and traditions, and during conflicts or in near-conflict situations for example in some big cities. "Violence against children continues," she said, "not only because of what we do as adults but also because of what we do not do."

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Everyone agreed that one of the obstacles facing all those who want to understand why violence against children happens, and how it can be stopped, is the fact that so often people are reluctant to discuss it and to acknowledge that so many 'everyday' behaviours are in fact violent. It is important to 'break down the wall of silence' and speak out against violence and make a real attempt to recommend what can be done.

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Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, the Independent Expert appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General to lead the Study on Violence against Children, stressed that violence cuts across all boundaries – national, economic, cultural, ethnic and others. “Because of that, all societies,” Professor Pinheiro said, “no matter what their cultural, economic or social status, can and must fight with all their might to face up to and stop violence against our children”.

According to the World Health Organization, 29 per cent of all homicide victims in Latin America are between 10 and 19 years of age. As long as we accept that a father can beat his child as a means of education; as long as a master shows no respect to his students; as long as the police find it acceptable to torture or kill a child or lock him up in a dark cell where violence reigns, little will change.

Professor Pinheiro painted a picture of the context in which violence against children occurs and is tolerated. “In this region,” he said, “we have achieved important improvements in the judicial systems and now we have relatively tranquil electoral processes. Despite this, the great majority of Latin Americans still do not enjoy the rights that should be theirs; economic inequalities have grown and social welfare that was once fragile is now almost non-existent. To this difficult situation we have to add a rise in levels

of violence that affects everyone including the youngest members of our society. According to the World Health Organization, 29 per cent of all homicide victims in Latin America are between 10 and 19 years of age... As long as we accept that a father can beat his child as a means of education; as long as a master shows no respect to his students; as long as the police find it acceptable to torture or kill a child or lock him up in a dark cell where violence reigns, little will change in Latin America.”

The participants at the regional consultation agreed on many points. There was a general understanding of the different kinds of violence that children in the region face and the impact it has on their lives. The people who inflict that violence are not hidden in the shadows – it is clear where violence arises and who perpetrates it. But there were some areas where not everyone was in agreement. Many people, for example, believe that girls and women are more exposed to violence, especially sexual violence. Others believe that boys and men are just as exposed to violence but that it takes different forms and depends on their status and whether they have any means of protection from it.

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The youth delegates were concerned about poverty, which they believe produces a society in which violence may be seen as the only answer to some problems. And they expressed their concern about migration that puts people, including children, at risk in many ways. Violence as portrayed by the media in Latin America – especially on television and in the movies – was of great concern to them, not only because of the high levels of violence shown on screen but also because of the way it is sensationalized and glorified.

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Another area of concern highlighted in the opening session was the increase in state violence in the guise of ‘homeland security’. The repressive response that some governments are taking to global and national threats against national security are considered by some to promote acceptance of violence as a valid response. ‘Zero tolerance’, ‘iron hand’ policies and imprisonment without trial are becoming more frequent in the region and give cause for concern. Roberto Garreton, Latin America and the Caribbean’s representative on the United Nations Commission for Human Rights, said, “general violations of human rights are frequently the hard core of national and international insecurity”.

Outside the opening session, there was a special session where representatives of the Governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, El Salvador, Paraguay, Panama and Uruguay signed a statement of intent, ‘The Buenos Aires Declaration’. This is a sign of the political commitment and determination of these countries to put an end to violence against children:

Buenos Aires Declaration on Violence against Children and Adolescents

We, Ministers and senior international authorities on human rights, have gathered in Buenos Aires for the Latin American consultation within the framework of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children, taking into consideration the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments, as well as the principles that guide them, to proclaim the present Declaration:

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1. Latin America is one of the most violent regions in the world, with children and women the main victims. Millions of children on our continent live in fear of being victims of violence at home, in schools and on the streets. Physical and psychological violence aimed at children include extra-judicial executions, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, corporal punishment even within the family, sexual abuse and exploitation, and trafficking in persons.
2. A worrying social tolerance towards violence against children exists, often compounded by the inadequate way in which the media and political actors handle the problem. This results in impunity for the perpetrators, silence about sexual abuse, a tacit acceptance of the inhuman and degrading conditions suffered by many children and adolescents deprived of their liberty; in the repeated proposals to reduce the age of criminal responsibility; and in sentencing to life imprisonment or the death penalty for crimes committed by people under the age of 18.

In relation to these serious problems, we consider of paramount concern the following:

3. Emphasize that there is a growing will among the States of the region to change the economic patterns that generate poverty, to which violence against children is closely linked.
4. To radically change social, cultural, political and legal parameters for children and adolescents, who must not be targets of stigmatisation or discrimination. Public policies for children must not be approached exclusively taking only into account considerations of public safety. Proposals such as reducing the age of criminal responsibility and increasing penalties are not adequate solutions to violence related to children.
5. Parents, teachers and other people interacting with children must refrain from using physical or psychological punishment as a disciplinary method or for any other purpose. This type of punishment must be banned by law and an end to these practices must be promoted.
6. All public policies on children and adolescents, as well as any interactions by State agents with all people under the age of 18, must be based on the premise that all children are human rights holders. Children have the right to receive protection, care and special support from the State, which must provide them fully, respecting the general principles of the 'best interest' and the 'integral protection of children'. Children must have a voice on issues related to them.

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7. State policies on the human rights of children must focus on meeting their basic needs and provide opportunities for a decent life. For this purpose, efforts must concentrate on eliminating violence through public policies on the human rights of children and provide education, health, protection, nutrition and welfare programmes and services both within the family and the community.
8. Education is key to preventing violence. To this end, quality education that is free of charge and equitable must be ensured. In any case, it is necessary to eliminate any fees, such as parents' and representatives' contributions, the obligatory purchase of books or materials, and the mandatory use of uniform or shoes to attend school, since in practice these requirements deny children their right to an education. Equally important is that States provide poor children with nutritional supplements, including at least one meal per day. We also emphasize the specific importance of sexual education to prevent violence.
9. Also key is respect for the life and the physical, psychological and mental integrity of children and adolescents, and their right to judicial guarantees and the presumption of innocence. Nobody can be deprived of liberty without a warrant, or under the excuse of such concepts as social danger. When in special circumstances it is imperative to take these kinds of measures, children and adolescents should be treated humanely, with respect and guaranteeing their basic rights, especially to life, personal integrity, health, education and the preservation of their family ties. All professionals offering services in social networks who encounter any case of violence against children and adolescents in the course of their work must report such cases to the competent authorities for the investigation and sanctioning of perpetrators.
10. We recognize and encourage the role of organizations such as UNICEF, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the World Health Organization, the Office of the Rapporteur on Children of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, as well as the civil society organizations working on human rights, especially those that promote children's rights.

Buenos Aires, 1 June 2005

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Violence against children in Latin America

Latin America is one of the most violent regions in the world; women and children are the main victims. In many ways violence against children is tolerated, perhaps because it takes place in a context where violence is seen as commonplace. Sadly, many children live their lives in fear of violence – at home, in school and on the streets.

The 19 countries that make up this region have much in common because of a shared history, their cultural mixes and their multi-ethnic nature. However, they also differ in many ways, not least in their levels of poverty – to a large extent a result of historical and structural factors – and the impact this has on their levels of development.

Some indicators illustrate this well: in Bolivia, for example, people can expect to live to around 64 years of age, while in Costa Rica the average life expectancy is 78 – a wide difference of 14 years. The mortality rate for children under the age of five is more than seven times higher in Bolivia than it is in Chile. In Bolivia, Honduras and Nicaragua, annual income per capita is below US\$1,000; in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru and the Dominican Republic, it is between \$1,000 and \$3,000; in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, Uruguay and Venezuela, it is above \$3,000.

Across the region, there are wide disparities in the distribution of income. The poorest 40 per cent of the population receives 10 per cent of total income, while the richest 20 per cent receives some 60 per cent.

The inhuman face of many social policies has resulted in low-income families missing out on welfare benefits and social services.

In this region where around 47 per cent of the population is made up of children under the age of 18 – some 191,028,000 out of a total population of 522,959,000 – children suffer most.

The regional consultation heard also that the impact of poverty and the wide gap between rich and poor has been exacerbated by the inhuman face of many economic policies, which have resulted in low-income families missing out on welfare benefits and social services. In this region where around 47 per cent of the population is made up of children under the age of 18 – some 191,028,000 out of a total population of 522,959,000 – children consequently suffer most from these inequalities.

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Where children and their families feel discriminated against, abandoned by the social system and have to scrape a living, children are at risk of violence. This may be in their home and family, where stress compounded by possible drug or alcohol use, as well as structures founded on ‘machismo’ and male dominance, result in violence between adults and against children. Figures for domestic violence are high across the region: between 10 and 36 per cent of women are victims of violence in their homes; not only is it likely that many children are also direct victims of violent family members, they are also affected when they witness violence against another family member, most often their mother.

Children may also witness or be targets of violence on the streets where disenfranchised youth are easy prey to criminal elements involved in drugs, arms and other anti-social activities. Across the region many children live on the streets: most of the 7 million children and young people estimated to be living on the streets in Latin America say they ended up there because of violence at home or in their workplace.

Children also experience violence in their schools or in institutions, where violence at the hands of teachers, supervisors and other children reflects attitudes outside the classroom and is inadequately regulated or monitored.

It may also be in the workplace – in formal work or in the informal economy. Given the levels of poverty prevailing and the low awareness of the rights of children to be protected from the fall-out, many children in the region start work at an early age or work part-time to supplement their income while also attending school. The International Labour Organization’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC), estimates that between 12.6 and 19.7 million children between the ages of five and 17 participate in economic activities – two-thirds of these in a situation of child labour because they are below the minimum working age or labouring in conditions that are considered hazardous or one of the worst forms of child labour.

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The impact of violence of all kinds on children is severe. In 2002, 635 children were murdered in Guatemala, and more than 2,000 children were murdered in Honduras between 2000 and 2005. Violence that does not result in death or serious injury, however, is often lost in the face of low reporting levels. Children nevertheless suffer: from physical injury that is not severe enough to require immediate treatment; from psychological violence whose impact may be long-term but suffered in silence; from sexual abuse at the hands of those they know and people they do not, which at times is visible but most often remains hidden.

The negative impacts of violence are not only intimate and individual. The impact of violence on economic and social development is also significant. It has been estimated, for example, that the direct and indirect cost of violence on El Salvador's GDP is around 25 per cent. For Colombia it is also just below 25 per cent, for Venezuela almost 12 per cent, for Brazil 10.5 per cent, for Peru around 5 per cent and for Mexico just over 12 per cent.

The vulnerability of children to violence also differs according to their sex, whether they live in the city or countryside (and which parts of the city they live in), their age, their socio-economic group and their ethnicity. Children with disabilities are also particularly vulnerable to violence, as are children from minority groups in general.

Why does violence occur?

Violence does not happen just because people are poor. Nor does it happen because drugs and arms are available. Violence is the result of a complex inter-play of factors that both prompt violence and also make children vulnerable to it.

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When families break down, the primary protection shield for children disappears or at the very least weakens. Family dysfunction, then, is a significant risk factor for children. It may happen because

the family cannot cope economically. There may be violence in the various relationships within the family – between spouses, between parents and children, among siblings, and there may be sexual violence in relationships between (usually) girl children and family members they should be able to trust. Drugs and

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alcohol use by family members, especially parents, also contribute to family dysfunction. And there are ‘sudden’ or ‘temporary’ factors that upset the way a family works, its ability to protect its children and the likelihood of violence happening, for example sudden illness or unemployment, or a death of one or both parents. In this regard, the impact of HIV/AIDS in the region is also a risk factor for violence against children, since it often deprives the family of a parent or older child.

Violence also happens when children are seen as ‘less valuable’ than adults and the legitimate target of adult anger or desire to dominate. In most countries of the region, the fact that children have rights – not only to live free of violence but also to express themselves, to have an opinion on matters concerning them, to go to school and not work prematurely and to health – is not widely understood or accepted. Additionally the prevalent so-called ‘macho’ culture which relegates women and girls to subservient status reinforces unequal relationships and makes girls in particular vulnerable to gender-related violence. This may result not only in violence in the family but also in children experiencing violence in other settings where they are seen as the ‘inferior’ part of a power structure: in the teacher/student relationship in school, for example, or the employer/worker relationship, or even the older/younger child relationship.

When these attitudes and actions are reproduced in the mass media – in films, music and television particularly – and are not condemned but rather normalized or even glamorized, then this contributes to broad social tolerance of violence and of the structures that underpin it.

In this region, also, the violence associated with crime is of concern. Children risk becoming part of the often glamorized ‘gang culture’, where drugs and the use of weapons are widespread and where human life may have little value. The regional presentation heard from Luke Dowdney, author of a 2005 publication, *Neither War nor Peace*, that millions of young people in the region are out of school and participate in gangs – the average age of gang members is 13.5 years. Children and adolescents as young as 11 years use firearms to defend turf in conflicts with the police and rival gangs. In some countries in the region, the number of deaths caused by firearms is greater than in countries officially at war. Most of the victims are under the age of 18.

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Some commentators consider that the commerce and use of drugs represent violence in themselves, but all agree that the impact of drugs on children's and adults' behaviour is often to prompt violence and always to increase vulnerability to other sources of violence. Children are targeted by criminal elements to pack, sell and courier drugs, in part because they are seen as 'expendable' if they get caught. Children are also exposed to drugs by those who wish to make a profit from exploiting them in the sex trade. In this region, then, the high levels of organized crime are also a factor contributing to violence against children.

However and for whatever reason violence is inflicted on children, it is always a grave denial of their rights, as well as a threat to their health and development.

It is the responsibility of all people, but governments above all, to ensure that children are protected from violence in the law and in practice. Where legal provisions are weak, or are not adequately enforced, violence continues. Where social services are not available or inadequate, children will suffer. Where the best interests of the child are not taken fully into account in policies and programmes, children will continue to be vulnerable to violence of many kinds.

Violence in the home and family

The consultation heard that there are no comprehensive statistics available on violence against children in the home and family because no country in the region collects such data. Although some institutions collect data on children who have experienced violence, these are only partial and do not allow conclusions to be drawn on the full scope of the problem. As a result, reports probably underestimate the numbers of children who suffer in silence at the hands of family members and others in their family circle.

Nevertheless, violence in the home and family is considered to be the most common and frequent form of violence that children experience in the countries of Central America and in the Dominican Republic. Such violence includes physical violence (normally in the guise of discipline and including smacking and beating with an object), psychological violence (insults, shouting and humiliating, for example) and sexual violence. Corporal punishment is used more often against boys than girls although girls from rural areas report that they are whipped with strands of wool. This 'discipline' has resulted in the death of a number of children.

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Studies have asserted that in their homes – the place where they should feel safe and protected – many children experience ‘terror regimes’. They are unable to protect themselves because they are not listened to and, additionally, many women are unable to speak out to protect their children.

Although some women do inflict violence on their children, it is overwhelmingly the men of the Latin American family who use violence as a tool to assert their will. This results also in high rates of conjugal violence, and children who witness their mother being treated violently are profoundly affected. Studies show that such children may live in fear and become reclusive and untrusting, or conversely may ‘join in’ as they get older, especially if they are boys, because they learn violence from their fathers and consider it a legitimate element of relationships. Research shows, for example, that children who have witnessed violence at home may torture animals – something that is not illegal in most countries of the region. It is a sad fact that violence is learned.

Across the region, it is estimated that some 6 million children are victims of violence in their homes and family at any one time. Children between the ages of 0 and 4 are twice as much at risk as children between the ages of 5 and 14. Each year 80,000 children and young people die as a result of violence at the hands of a family member.

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In a survey carried out in Costa Rica, 42 per cent of the women interviewed said that their husband or partner beat their children. This may understate the actual number, given the reluctance of many women to speak out about such things. Additionally, around half of the women said they believed that corporal punishment is necessary for children to learn. The situation is similar across the region.

Addressing violence in the home and family has to go beyond laws (although these are an important element of any strategy) and must aim to change attitudes that both promote such violence and accept it when it happens. If this does not happen, then violence in the family will be passed from generation to generation as ‘customary’ and ‘normal’.

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Children, girls especially, also suffer sexual violence by a family member. Across the region, child sexual abuse is hidden behind fear of ‘interfering in family matters’, disbelief that it can be happening and general reluctance to get involved. This despite widespread rejection of this particularly heinous attack on the rights of all children to be protected from sexual violence of all kinds and the fact that all the countries of the region have put in place mechanisms for reporting sexual abuse. As a result, it is estimated that, for every case reported, four or five go unreported.

Although few countries collect centralized data on sexual abuse in the family, studies in Peru indicate that eight out of 10 cases of sexual abuse are perpetrated by someone in the victim’s family circle. In school surveys carried out in Chile, Costa Rica, Panama and Peru, between 5 and 40 per cent of female adolescents said that they had experienced sexual abuse.

Violence in schools

14 Corporal punishment has long been practised in schools and other educational institutions in Latin America. By 2003, only Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Suriname had banned it.

Since physical punishment is widely permitted and therefore does not have to be reported, it is difficult to know how many children suffer this form of violence, nor how often nor at what level of severity. In some countries it is reported to be a ‘daily occurrence’ for many children.

Children themselves say that they are more likely to suffer verbal violence from both teachers and other pupils, and that they consider this a violation of their rights. Children also report that teachers more regularly pick out younger pupils for violent treatment than older children.

Younger children report, also, that they are picked on by older pupils ‘because they are older’. In Costa Rica, for example, children report that physical violence is the most common form of violence they experience at school, usually from other pupils. A survey of school children in El Salvador revealed that physical violence is particularly common while children are playing sports.

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Some participants at the regional consultation suggested that discrimination is akin to indirect violence because of the impact it has on children. They cited particularly the fact that poor children may be sent home from school and excluded because they do not have the proper uniform or the textbooks required of them. The children and young people said that the fact that they are not allowed to express their opinions in school also has a significant impact on their well-being and that verbal violence is one form of violence that seems ever-present.

The only systematic study covering violence at school was carried out by UNESCO in Brazil. The study was carried out in 14 state capitals and captured the perceptions of young people, parents, teachers and principals of more than 300 public and private schools. The study showed that children who experience violence at school are more likely to drop out of school or be expelled, that their relationships suffer and that they become reticent.

A group of indigenous girls said that the teacher locked older girls in the bathroom and tried to sexually abuse them, saying that he would give them lower grades if they refused.

Some children say that sexual violence is also inflicted by some teachers in exchange for good grades or qualifications. Both male and female adolescents are affected. Boys, however, were more reluctant to talk about this than girls. Children from several countries in the region all said they knew girls who had been sexually abused at school. A group of indigenous girls said that the teacher locked older girls in the bathroom and tried to sexually abuse them, saying that he would give them lower grades if they refused.

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Violence in institutions

Children may find themselves in institutions of various kinds for various reasons, and are not always appropriately placed there. The regional consultation chose to consider in particular the situation of children who have come into conflict with the law and have entered the judicial process, whether or not they have actually committed an offence.

Children may be held in custody or sentenced to spend time in a correctional institution. In this latter case, the regional consultation heard that one of the major problems facing children in such institutions is neglect

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and the generally poor infrastructure and staffing. Inadequate conditions not only affect children directly but also indirectly in the frustration and stress they cause to staff members of the institutions. Such stress can constitute a trigger factor that prompts an act of violence towards the child.

The consultation heard the case of Brazil, for example, where correctional institutions are grossly overcrowded, which is in itself a risk factor in violence against children. In Paraguay, similarly, a 2004 study of just nine centres that exist for the whole country pointed to the need to ensure that children are housed separately from adults; that infrastructure and hygiene requirements needed improvement; that children were often victims of communal punishment; and that children should have access to formal or non-formal learning opportunities. These comments have resonance across the region.

Children in institutions may suffer the same regimes of punishment as in schools and at home – physical, verbal, psychological and sexual violence as a means of imposing hierarchies of power are normal. The same ‘lessons’ are regularly meted out by the police. Additionally, children identified corruption as a form of violence, along with police inaction when citizens require their help. A group of boys said that the police believe they are chiefs, masters of all and that this gives them the right to abuse.

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The Committee on the Rights of the Child has expressed its concern at reports of ill treatment and torture by the police at the time of arrest and while children are in custody or in correctional institutions. Policy brutality resulting in the deaths of a number of children in Buenos Aires was singled out for criticism, as were authorities who did not pursue investigations into the deaths.

Most children and young people in the region look upon the police not as a source of support when they need help but as a danger.

There is insufficient data, however, to be able to quantify the participation of state representatives in the deaths of children in the various countries of the region. The cloak of clandestinity that surrounds these incidents means that perpetrators act with impunity. The consultation concluded that most children and young people in the region look upon the police not as a source of support when they need help but as a danger.

Violence in communities

Most of the victims and perpetrators of violence in Latin America are young men between the ages of 15 and 24. One of the principal factors of relevance to this reality is the large number of youth factions and gangs in poor urban enclaves where violence is an almost permanent feature. A group of boys surveyed for the consultation said that, “if you do not have a gang, they say you will not have anything in life. They threaten you and say if they find you on the street, they will kill you”. Many children join the gangs between the ages of 13 and 15.

Street violence is a daily occurrence and the problem has deteriorated rapidly in the last decade. Many of the young people involved in gang violence have dropped out of school and have limited opportunities for finding work. The fact that so much of the violence is met with no response from the authorities means that those who commit acts of violence do so with impunity. Easy access to alcohol and drugs and the availability of firearms contribute to the situation.

“If you do not have a gang, they say you will not have anything in life. They threaten you and say if they find you on the street, they will kill you.”

The consultation heard also that many adolescents have learned the habit of violence at home, school and in the media, where youth aggression is often treated sympathetically.

Gang violence has been the subject of a number of studies. Colombia and El Salvador have been identified as two countries where the problem is particularly severe. Factional violence is also of concern in Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua.

Between 1978 and 2000, 39,000 people died in Colombia as a result of armed conflict; during the same period, 49,913 died in Rio de Janeiro from small arms fire.

The streets of Latin America often offer children and young people a ‘community’ where they create their own sub-culture, with their own music, lifestyles, way of dressing and language. These ‘street communities’ do not always include violence, although they are often presumed to be violent. As a result the children and young people are often stigmatized and treated as outcasts and this, in itself, can provoke violence.

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Violence in workplaces

ILO-IPEC estimates that, in 2005, at least 19.7 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 were engaged in economic activity in 19 countries of Latin America, just under 15 per cent of the total number of children in this age range. Although most of these children are in a situation of child labour because they have not reached the minimum working age or are working in conditions that are hazardous or put their health, safety or morals at risk, some of the children will be of working age and so ‘legitimately’ employed.

Even where those in child labour do not suffer direct acts of violence, they are extremely vulnerable to violence because of the nature of their working relationships and by the very fact that they are very young, inexperienced, and more often than not engaged in the informal and unregulated economy

Some commentators believe that child labour is *per se* violent. It is certainly in contravention of the child’s right to live free of exploitation and to enjoy her/his rights to education, recreation, good health and the chance to build a healthy future. Even where those in child labour do not suffer direct acts of violence, moreover, they are extremely vulnerable to violence because of the nature of their

working relationships – with employer, co-workers and clients – and by the very fact that they are very young, inexperienced, in an irregular and therefore exploitable situation, and more often than not engaged in the informal and unregulated economy.

Working children are also vulnerable to violence, however, from employers, co-workers and others who expect them to perform like adults even when they are young and relatively inexperienced.

Some 10 per cent of the total population of children between the ages of 5 and 17 in the region are in one of the worst forms of child labour. These are spelled out in ILO Convention (1999) No.182, which commits States Party to act moving swiftly to eliminating the worst forms of child labour. These include slavery or equivalents such as forced labour or debt bondage; child prostitution and pornography; recruitment into armed conflict; exploitation in illicit activities such as drug running; any labour that has involved trafficking of a child; and any labour that is hazardous to the child’s health, safety or morals.

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In this region, children work in a range of activities where their health and safety is compromised: in markets unloading vehicles and carrying heavy loads; in fireworks factories where they risk respiratory infections, poisoning and the hazards of explosions; and in fisheries where they may contract skin infections and punctures from fish bones.

Children working in agriculture in the region on coffee and sugar plantations, picking vegetables or grains, are exposed to long hours under the sun, to toxic products used as fertilizers and fungicides, to snake bites and to long days of bending or stretching. Many children also work on the streets selling small items and face the hazards of street life.

Of particular concern in this region is the situation of children, especially girls, in child domestic labour. Girls may 'live in' with the employer's family or combine housework with schooling and living at home. Whatever the arrangement, the reality is that while working for the employer they are effectively hidden away behind the closed doors of a private home. And they are invariably in an effective master/servant situation and at the whim of the employer – male or female. Children report that they suffer physical punishment, verbal violence and sometimes sexual violence. Much of the physical and psychological violence is inflicted by the woman of the house, but children may also face violence from the man of the family, the children and other co-workers.

Of particular concern in this region is the situation of children, especially girls, in child domestic labour. While working for the employer they are effectively hidden away behind the closed doors of a private home.

The use of children as drug packers, couriers and dealers is also a problem in a number of countries. Not only do such children face possible arrest and incarceration, they are also at risk of becoming users themselves (or of sliding deeper into addiction) and are vulnerable to the violence that is part and parcel of drug-related crime.

Also of concern in the region is the exploitation of children in the commercial sex trade. Girls in particular are at risk when prostituted of physical violence, introduction to substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections (including HIV/AIDS), reproductive health problems, psychosocial trauma, and stigmatization and exclusion.

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The commercial sexual exploitation of children in Latin America is impossible to quantify. It is invariably illegal and operates clandestinely: in closed houses, brothels, hotels and places of entertainment. A number of reports looking at the phenomenon of child sex tourism have focused on American and Canadian men who travel to Brazil in order to buy sex from minors.

In recent years there have been reports also that children are trafficked into prostitution both within and between countries in the region and into the United States. For some time it has been known that girls are moved into mining areas in Latin American countries, for example, to service the large groups of men who live isolated from their families and communities. This often involves coercion and threats and girls have been killed when they attempted to leave.

Actions to end violence and protect children

Across the region, governments, NGOs, international agencies and others working on behalf of children have made notable efforts to address the problem of violence against children. For example, 16 of the countries of the region introduced legislation covering violence in the family in the 1990s (essentially domestic violence legislation). Most countries have introduced legislation covering various forms of physical, psychological and sexual violence, however these are far from comprehensive and as a result their impact has not been great. Additionally, almost all of these laws have been non-specific, resulting from advocacy on behalf of women's rights and so not targeted at protecting children. For example, laws sanctioning violence in the family do not specifically outlaw corporal punishment and, since this is often not considered by many to be violence at all, it is not reported.

The consultation heard of a successful initiative in Colombia, however, where the Ministry of Social Protection launched an information and education action that aimed to reduce violence in Bogotá, Cali and Medellín. The project established baseline information on violence, focusing on children, and included various communication and education actions. Importantly, at the end of the pilot phase, the project was evaluated against the baseline data to measure impact. It was judged to have resulted in significant changes in attitudes and behaviour. On the basis of the test phase, the results will be used to plan future interventions.

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Corporal punishment is prohibited in schools in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Suriname, and in correctional institutions in Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Paraguay. However, while Bolivian law aims to protect children in correctional institutions from corporal punishment, the Bolivian Penal Code treats the instigators of such violence with impunity. This illustrates well the need not only to introduce new laws but to revise the whole legal framework to ensure consistency.

There have been actions, for example, at local level to reduce the vulnerability of indigenous children to violence: in the Chimborazo region of Ecuador, for example, the provincial authorities have permitted indigenous children to attend school in traditional dress rather than regulation uniform. This may seem to have little to do with violence against children, but it is known that encouraging a strong identity among ethnic minority children and pride in their heritage makes them less likely targets of school bullying and of discrimination by teachers. A small step, but an important one.

The consultation also heard of initiatives in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, Dominican Republic and Venezuela to introduce protection programmes that are based in the communities where children live, rather than removing children who might need protection. Similarly, Peru and El Salvador were singled out for having introduced programmes to reintegrate children into their communities when they have lived outside them.

However, isolated actions like this – while they have a positive effect on a small group of children – do not impact on the problem of violence against children as a whole. Limited initiatives need to be evaluated, shared and where effective scaled up. And they need to be supported by national-level policies and frameworks.

The regional consultation discussed the importance of bringing national legislations into line with the CRC not only to provide children with the fullest protection possible but also to send a clear signal from government that children's rights are taken seriously and that violence will not be tolerated.

Promises made to children through ratification of the CRC – and all the countries in the region have ratified the Convention – need to be translated into

Promises made to children through ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child need to be translated into policies and services that transform the promises into reality.

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policies and services that transform the promises into reality. These may include National Plans of Action – for example against child labour – or broader initiatives to address issues of social development and poverty. When these are in place, administrative and financial resources must be guaranteed to implement them.

The example was given of positive initiatives to reshape the juvenile justice system in some countries, particularly Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama. The consultation heard that Mexico, Colombia, Argentina and Uruguay have fallen behind in this regard.

Across Latin America, there are many active NGOs and offices of international agencies, and it is important that they cooperate and share experiences so that scarce resources are not wasted on duplicated actions or initiatives whose impact is questionable. Governments can take the lead in promoting cooperation under the umbrella of national plans and strategies.

For these to be really effective, they must be based on a good understanding of the problems facing children and what is already being done to address them. Participants at the regional consultation noted on a number of occasions that there is a lack of reliable data on violence against children and that the data that are available are often not complete or are not broken down into age, sex and other categories that would allow accurate analysis.

Another important element of information gathering is the resource of children and young people themselves. Although there have been some isolated attempts to include children in discussions – for example in the run-up to the regional consultation – children are not always systematically included in the development of policies and programmes that concern them. And yet children know better than anyone the challenges they face.

Gaps and challenges

The regional consultation considered some areas that require immediate attention. It was noted that only three countries – Colombia, Chile and Cuba – have not taken significant steps to bring their legal frameworks into line with the CRC. The consultation considered that implementing the CRC fully through national laws is a sign of respect for human rights. However, when laws have been reviewed and revised, they also have to be enforced, and the regional consultation discussed the fact that this has not always happened in Latin America.

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One area of concern that was raised on a number of occasions was the lack of trust many people have in law enforcement bodies who, it was argued, are sometimes corrupt and complicit in violence and do not always respond as people believe they should.

One area of concern that was raised on a number of occasions was the lack of trust many people have in law enforcement bodies who, it was argued, are sometimes corrupt and complicit in violence.

In this respect, participants considered that professionals in law enforcement, social services, education, health and other fields would benefit from more and repeated training and capacity building not only in the rights of the child but also in how to translate those rights into their own work. Only when professionals are convinced of their role in ensuring that children enjoy the rights that are theirs will they be able to participate in building a protective environment for children.

Another issue highlighted was the importance of ensuring the human rights of former and current gang members who in general have experienced extreme poverty, murders, arbitrary arrest, stigmatization and discrimination. It is important that governments and law enforcement entities do not approach the issue of children and young people's involvement in gangs purely as a public safety issue and deal with it through repressive and punitive institutions. It is vital that policies relating to social issues involving children take the best interests of the child into account at all times and that their right to education, protection, health care, nutrition and welfare programmes be assured at both family and community level. When they come into conflict with the law, children must continue to enjoy their civil and political rights including the right to a fair trial, adequate legal accompaniment that is child-friendly, with deprivation of liberty only used as a last resort.

Other gaps and challenges are reflected in the detailed recommendations that were put forward to the United Nations Study on Violence against Children, and that follow.

Recommendations and next steps

At the end of their deliberations, the various working groups that had met during the regional consultation presented their recommendations and these were considered in a plenary session.

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The final recommendations will be an important contribution to understanding the problem of violence against children in Latin America and will be taken into account in the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children.

The Independent Expert, Professor Pinheiro, closed the meeting with a reminder that “democratic consolidation in Latin America will only be possible when children are educated in respect, freedom and non-violence, protected against any violation of their rights”.

A summary version of the recommendations is given below.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM LATIN AMERICA FOR THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S STUDY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

General recommendations

- Ensure that strategies addressing economic and social development in the region include as a matter of priority the reduction of violence and that national policies and programmes for this are multisectoral, inter-institutional and are adequately funded;
- Ensure that data on the problem of violence are collected systematically and in a disaggregated manner so that violence against children can be better defined and studied; undertake specific research on violence against children to complement these data;
- Design and implement long-term strategies to address the economic, social and cultural contexts that increase the risk of violence against children, for example addressing inequalities and uneven access to basic services, health and education;
- Introduce training and education programmes to eliminate corporal and psychological punishment including methods for non-violent conflict resolution;
- Design and implement strategies whose impact will be seen in the medium term to address risk factors such as alcoholism, drug use, and the widespread use of small arms; take measures to improve community safety including training of police forces and directly involving local governors and authorities;

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- In the short term, introduce universal policies and programmes targeting especially vulnerable groups; these should be comprehensive, interdisciplinary, inter-institutional and inter-sectoral;
- Promote understanding of existing laws and effectively implement them;
- Redouble efforts in identifying the most effective governmental and non-governmental initiatives to reduce violence against children and protect children, in the Latin American context, through evaluation of impact.

Specific recommendations

Policies, programmes and resources for the prevention of violence

Legislative reform

- In moving forward with the review of legislation, and in particular in designing mechanisms guaranteeing the application of the revised laws, it is important that States rely on research, conclusions and the experience of society, as well as on the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child;
- Specifically it is important to achieve common standards across the various national regulations that establish the minimum age for marriage, for enrolment and leaving school, the minimum age for employment and of criminal responsibility. This should also include criteria for prevention and protection;
- Corporal punishment must be eradicated; countries should explicitly include in their legislation the prohibition of corporal punishment and humiliation as methods of discipline;
- Government employees, and particularly those that are responsible for the judicial system, should be made legally responsible for failing to apply the CRC;
- Establish an effective legal framework that would end impunity for those engaged in sexual abuse and ensure protection for victims during the legal process.

Policies: Education and culture

- Encourage the direct participation of children and adolescents in the debate on public policies to prevent all types of violence against children;
- Encourage educational policies that promote respect and tolerance for difference;

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- Promote social investment in the prevention of violence against children and adolescents at a local level through activities that build social capital;
- Identify and promote practices among indigenous communities and the different cultural, ethnic and religious groups that are favourable to the protection of childhood and adolescence;
- Through education, information and raising awareness, eradicate practices that violate the human rights of children and adolescents, especially the right to enjoy a life free from violence and the right to protection against all types of mistreatment and exploitation;
- Adopt strategies, plans and programmes to change discriminatory cultural norms that support the establishment and replication of social stereotypes which in turn lead to specific manifestations of violence against children and adolescents.

Policies: Focus on rights

- Refocus public policy on the protection and prevention of violence away from welfare, in favour of a focus on respect for and promotion of the rights of children and adolescents, and specifically for the right to a life free of violence and to protection against mistreatment and exploitation;
- Childhood protection policies must be adopted at State level and not simply by governments, in order to guarantee continuity and permanence of basic principles and institutional actions in respect of prevention of violence against children and the care of victims. Political will must be shown by the allocation of sufficient resources for these programmes to be implemented;
- Strengthen democratic institutions and the social and community conscience by establishing a vision of citizenship training on the right of children to enjoy a life free of violence;
- Consolidate the processes of cooperation between international organizations and States, and between States themselves, whether multilateral or bilateral, in the fight against violence towards children;
- Promote strategies at an institutional and organizational level, highlighting situations involving violence against children, that allow: a) the preparation, submission and follow-up of complaints; b) Rules governing sanctions against government employees who do not carry out their responsibilities; c) Care and rehabilitation for victims; d) Care and rehabilitation for offenders;
- Establish a state entity comprised of professionals, operating at a national level, responsible for coordinating, executing and following up plans and projects for the prevention of violence against

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children and the care of victims, with appropriate authority to make all embracing decisions and with sufficient resources to achieve its objectives;

- Advocate for financial resources to be distributed in a way that places a priority on the best interests of the child, within the framework of the CRC;
- Encourage the implementation of social inspection and audit processes within civil society in order to ensure greater transparency, efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of public policies;
- Improve the operational capabilities of independent organizations involved in verifying compliance with human rights, such as the Offices of the Ombudsman of Human Rights, ensuring the complete cooperation of State institutions and the allocation of sufficient resources within the state budget;
- Ensure that employees of entities that administer justice are aware of and receive training relating to violence against children and adolescents;
- Demand compliance with the commitment made by developed countries to dedicate 0.7% of their GDP to support this development;
- The objectives set out in the Declaration of Tampere (30th November 2001) must be adopted again;
- Encourage the establishment of communications channels enabling individuals to make a direct approach to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and develop the current processes within the Inter-American Human Rights System;
- Guarantee that children and adolescents orphaned by HIV/AIDS can fully exercise their rights, and that children living with the virus, especially those living in institutions, are protected from stigma.

Policies: Participation of children and adolescents

- Document, organize and distribute evidence of situations where children and adolescents have participated directly in preventing violence and in constructing tools to bring to end violence against people below the age of 18;
- Promote programmes involving participation by children who have been victims of violence, as part of their rehabilitation, on a strictly voluntary basis and accompanied by appropriate professionals;
- Guarantee participation by children and adults in the process of prevention through encouraging increasing degrees of autonomy;

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- Guarantee the participation of children in the judicial process by introducing legal processes that place their interests first;
- Reports submitted by each country to the Committee on the Rights of the Child must include recommendations that have arisen from consultation with children;
- Make efforts to increase the participation of children in the mass media in order to: promote the use of children's own voices, rather than adults using children and adolescents to say what they want them to say; allow children to voice their opinions on all issues that affect them; give children and adolescents specifically identified opportunities for participation, by leading, providing opinion and producing information.

Prevention of violence

The integral nature of prevention

- Give priority to preventing violence against children and providing protection for victims, in relief activities in response to emergencies and disasters, whether man-made or from natural causes;
- Improve negotiation between financing agencies and those that carry out relief work so that they share a greater level of commitment to joint criteria and interests;
- Bring together the State sector, international agencies and participants from society in general so that they can respond in a unified and concerted way in the processes of prevention, through coordinated and integrated action;
- Demand concrete and effective action on the part of governments to ensure their compliance with agreements entered into and, specifically, to establish targets for child protection in their respective National Plans of Action drawn up as one of World Fit for Children obligations agreed at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002.

Basic criteria for intervention activities to prevent violence

- Establish and distribute minimum standards for preventive actions, placing particular emphasis on: strengthening emotional ties and communication in relation to child development; factors that promote resilience; developing emotional competences; building and strengthening social networks and applying the principles established in the CRC;

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- Governments must give child-rearing practices guidance aimed at preventing violence against children;
- Involve those elements of society that are closest to children (family, school, community) -- training adults in communication skills with children and adolescents, creating an atmosphere within which their personalities can develop in a healthy way and their rights and dignity can be respected;
- In the case of sexual abuse, train children and adolescents in techniques of self protection, and the capabilities of adults should also be strengthened; in addition, develop the capacity of protection systems within the legal framework to respond immediately when required;
- Guarantee sufficient basic training for men and women who work with children and adolescents and for those who are responsible for protecting and training them;
- Establish the conditions under which all forms of discrimination that constitute acts of violence against children and adolescents can be eradicated;
- Carry out campaigns to raise awareness of this problem, as part of a process of cultural change, and get involved with existing programmes that bring to light the humiliating effects of corporal punishment and that publicize alternative methods of teaching about peaceful coexistence.

Coordination among institutions

- Improve protection systems at local level, emphasizing the use of networks, with specific and complementary functions at each level in developing intervention activities for protection of children. This requires developing individual competences, appropriate institutional regulations and favourable social environments.

Re-establishing rights

Institutional processes

- Adopt policies looking after children that are integrated, global but decentralized and participative so as to guarantee that the child's best interests are put first and that imprisonment is used only as a last resort and for the shortest time possible;
- Promote and develop programmes resulting from alliances, starting with existing capabilities and expertise of public and private institutions in re-establishing rights;

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- Guarantee that society becomes aware that rights are a tool for rehabilitation, and that these rights include those that are appropriate to children and adolescent realities and include alternatives and best practice. This process must necessarily be accompanied by legal reforms, including alternative measures for conflict resolution;
- Starting with current international regulations and agreements, the State must establish rules guaranteeing that protection provided for children and adolescents meets established quality standards and is managed and executed from a perspective of quality, recognizing that adolescents are people who have their own rights;
- States must develop and give priority support to family development programmes and those that mainly relate to the re-establishment of rights;
- These programmes must be subject to public evaluation, and judged with impartiality and according to consensus in a way that allows them to be implemented with transparency;
- States must assign effective economic resources to the maximum extent available and guarantee that these resources will be assigned with transparency, in a context of de-centralization, and in a way that empowers the establishment of best practice in rehabilitation within a legal framework;
- Greater initiative must be taken to resolve conflicts at a community level through mediation and participation, before they are submitted to legal process, thereby contributing to the development of additional social capabilities. These initiatives may be in association with existing institutions, such as schools or community groups;
- Provide families with tools, resources and knowledge, and develop the capabilities of the primary reference points so that they are able to provide children and adolescents with safety, understanding and respect;
- Include a special focus on gender, special capabilities, groups and ethnicities into all programmes, also taking into consideration the needs of abused victims and procedures for integrated rehabilitation;
- Within the structure of laws and the legal system, develop the social function of those who operate within the justice system, such as expert witnesses and specialist technical teams, guaranteeing the development and strengthening of rights throughout the legal process. This must guarantee professional training, that specializes in childhood and adolescence;

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- Establish and strengthen efficient and easy-to-use systems of protection and guardianship, as protection methods, that particularly guarantee the immediate restoration of rights;
- Implement programmes for the restoration of the rights of children, adolescents and their families, incorporating where appropriate the PDDRR processes (prevention, disarming, demobilization, rehabilitation and reinsertion).

Juvenile justice

- People under the age of 18 who commit crimes must be subject to legally established specialized juvenile penal processes, within the framework established by the CRC, emphasizing education, rehabilitation and social reinsertion;
- Countries that have not yet adopted this should do so as quickly as possible, and those that have done so should guarantee that it is appropriately balanced between the special considerations of the legal system and the requirements of the protection services, ensuring effective provision of economic and technical resources.

The military and children and adolescents

- States must guarantee that no person under the age of 18 will be enrolled into military service and no children or adolescents will participate in armed conflicts;
- Monitor any military schools admitting people below the age of 18, and institutions with a hierarchical structure where children or adolescents are in residence, and where teaching involves risk to their development and their physical and psychological safety. This monitoring should look for any type of learning that involves rigorous authoritarian or repressive discipline, based on the administration of punishment or physical force, which is damaging for holistic development;
- Promote the effective supervision of the armed forces and all hierarchical institutions by means of an independent Ombudsman, whose role will be: to verify and guarantee the non-recruitment of people under the age of 18; promote an effective complaints procedure that is not linked to the structure of the armed forces; guarantee that no children or adolescents, or conscripts in general, are used in tasks that could be considered as exploitation; eliminate maltreatment; and investigate abuse and maltreatment committed in the environment of the military institution;

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- Immigration and Security Services, including the armed forces and private security services, must be subject to controls leading to effective legal criminal sanctions aimed at avoiding all kinds of abuse and violation of the rights of children and adolescents, trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation and illegal activities;
- Prohibit the presence of the military in any direct educational institutions, and of any people working as security guards in state institutions;
- Take firm and decisive steps as a matter of urgency to prohibit the general distribution and carrying of handguns.

Youth violence

- Consider the link between adolescent gang membership and participation in acts of violence not simply as a matter of public security, since this leads to stigmatization of the whole juvenile population, limits understanding of the situation that these young people face and prevents society from tackling the problem in an integrated way. It also leads governments to invest more in repression than in prevention and protection, and impedes the search for solutions focused on the underlying causes;
- Discourage the establishment of repressive or very strict emergency laws, such as those outlawing gangs adopted in some Central American countries, since this violates the rights of children and is not in accordance with national and international standards;
- Promote preventive measures at community and municipal level, with the support of national public policies, since this broadens children' access to educational, healthcare, recreational and work opportunities, and promotes their participation in society in general;

The media

Protection of rights in the public agenda

- Generate public disapproval of violence in general, and violence against children and adolescents in particular, by creating a dialogue in the media, which is based on the best interests of the child;
- Promote the creation of alternative media to provide information, training and publicity, which should include regional initiatives reflecting our reality, and should contribute to the promotion and protection of the human rights of children and adolescents;

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- Contribute to placing the theme of children and their rights in the public agenda; promote dialogue among citizens; strengthen cultural identity and give voice to the views of children and adolescents;
- Promote the use of local communications media, conveying messages that are appropriate to the local environment and that allow community issues and interests to be expressed, as an alternative to the media monopolies that in many cases do not reflect the concerns or needs of local communities;
- Organizations involved in the defence of children's rights, together with relevant government organizations, might adopt guidelines for action that: promote the idea that these themes can be positive for media; promote the concept of social marketing in the Latin American context, in ways that encourage the communications media to continue increasing their levels of professionalism and to justify their existence; encourage special programmes for children; establish prizes for journalists that promote working relationships with communicators and commitments on their part; provide training for journalists and communicators, not just through workshops and forums but also through postgraduate studies in childhood and adolescence.
- Develop long-term processes for encouraging communicators to take leading roles in campaigns for the prevention of violence, as part of their everyday work;
- Integrate into academic curricula in the field of media and communications subjects that promote better knowledge of human rights and violence against children;
- Form strategic alliances with information sources and work towards providing information that meets the needs of journalists in writing the news.

Standards

- Promote the establishment of a set of regional rules for regulating the media, defining policies for controlling the publicity that encourages violence and discrimination;
- create codes of ethics and community committees to supervise the activities of the media and thereby promote good practice in self-control of content in the different types of media: news, entertainment and advertising;
- In accordance with the CRC and with each country's laws, rules governing the communications media should demand respect for the rights of children and adolescents in the messages conveyed, given that children and young people are both audience and protagonists;

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- Legislation should demand: respect for intimacy or privacy, respect for the image and dignity of the individual, respect for the physical and moral integrity to which each child and adolescent has the right, both in terms of spectators and as part of media coverage.;
- Codes of ethics are also desirable as a support for self regulation; these codes should ensure that violence is not shown as entertainment and that its context and its complexity are emphasized; that the media provide respectful and informative coverage of issues relating to children and adolescents, based on research and follow up, including background information and that the content of information and entertainment programmes makes a positive contribution to developing the personalities of children and adolescents, promoting a quality of life which is built around civic and social values and promoting a healthy life style among children;
- The communications media should promote self-regulation. Journalists who are committed to the cause should create structures of self-regulation, which are adopted by their professional organizations;
- The rules should form part of a process to change the relationship between children and the media
- The media should participate in establishing ways of implementing these actions and organizations engaged in defence of rights such as the offices of public prosecutors, defence attorneys and ombudsman office should oversee compliance with these rules and denounce violations;
- Establish the office of media ombudsman to monitor content, and mechanisms that encourage community participation in investigating the incidence of children and adolescents appearing in the media.

Consumption of the media by children and adolescents

- Children and adolescents should be encouraged to develop criteria for responsible consumption of media output;
- Communities, families and the education sector have a responsibility to provide training that will help children and adolescents critically analyse the messages they receive from the communications media;
- Consumer associations should be established or strengthened in order to encourage public participation and the promotion of public opinion on the content of the communications media.

Producing knowledge: Investigation and information systems

Information and investigation strategies

- Align definitions and indicators of violence within each country and between countries in order to be able to make comparable measurements;
- Create or consolidate epidemiological systems of public health inspection that will allow continuous and systematic follow-up of information on manifestations of violence against children, including homicides, sexual abuse and physical ill treatment, based on official records wherever possible and using common operational definitions that permit information from different sources to be cross-referenced;
- Gather information using specialist surveys;
- Encourage qualitative research to understand the context in which violence manifests itself and to deal with problems;
- Encourage qualitative and quantitative research to develop a better and deeper understanding of the contexts in which different types of violence manifest themselves, so that policies and programmes can be designed using information that allows the specifics of the different causal factors to be tackled;
- Undertake special surveys measuring behaviours, attitudes and practices (using the PHO ACTIVA survey);
- Identify and establish alternative and complementary methodologies for measuring the extent of the different types of violence against children and adolescents, using for instance special telephone lines and research studies involving children and adolescents, revealing forms of violence that are hidden;
- Do not draw national conclusions from local studies and guarantee efficient and adequate response on behalf of the States and institutions in putting in place systems based on complaints and actively searching for or early detection of cases;
- Find methods that guarantee validity and confidentiality of information, and develop alternative methodologies and common definitions that enable measurement of the problem;
- Give priority to gathering information locally (at the municipal level) in order to get reliable data and to avoid errors;

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- Address the fact that there are no statistics on violence in schools in the countries of the region, perhaps by looking at cases recorded by the justice system;
- Implement national surveys as proposed by Education Ministries (in Brazil, Mexico and Colombia) which are used from the time of entry into school and carried out annually thereafter. Another method is the use of surveys in schools to gather information about activities to protect students from violence;
- In the case of juvenile and gang violence, the use of qualitative methods is recommended to find out why young people engage in this type of activity, the dynamics of gang violence, the relationship with use the and trafficking in drugs and other types of delinquency;
- The appropriate methodology for dealing with the issue of re-victimization as a form of institutional violence is to use specific studies based on surveys and in depth interviews;
- In case of detention centres for children and adolescents, promote research by specialist organizations and those dealing with human rights;
- In protective institutions, establish systems for making and recording complaints that are accessible to the young people themselves;
- Specialist surveys should be prepared using questions that can be understood by children and adolescents allowing the existence, frequency and magnitude of institutional violence to be evaluated, paying special attention to obtaining information about children and adolescent perceptions of violence, how they have suffered it, how they experience it and what in their opinion are some of the consequences;
- When considering the economic exploitation of children and the violence that this generates, design and implement qualitative studies that provide an in-depth understanding of the different possible sets of circumstances. Combining qualitative and quantitative data will allow analysis of the specific circumstances leading to the issuing of recommendations to national authorities as to how to comply with the CRC and the ILO Conventions that the countries have ratified;
- Academic organizations and centres must play a leading role in persuading government authorities to develop policies of protection and prevention based on science and hard evidence;
- NGOs have to bring authorities together and share with them the results of research. Control organizations such as the Ombudsman's Office should promote, defend and inspect human rights and promote internal discussion of this subject in public organizations;

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- Organizations responsible for generating information – academia, NGOs, researchers – must accept responsibility for providing high-quality data and for linking this with measurement of government compliance with targets;
- Those responsible for generating knowledge and producing information must translate results written in technical terms into simple language -- numbers have to be converted into people. The extent of the government's capacity to solve the problem must also be communicated;
- Public policy-making organizations must be involved with the academic research process from the beginning in order to ensure that their interests and needs are taken into account, thereby guaranteeing the usefulness of the data produced;
- Intervention activities to prevent violence against children and adolescents at all levels should include participative monitoring and evaluation systems, working from base lines and indicators that allow processes, results and impact to be evaluated. This requires information systems that allow the real magnitude of the problem to be determined, as well as the general effect of the intervention activities at the local level; observations and contributions by those who have benefited from intervention services or who have had access to programmes, indicating the outcomes and results obtained; resources for research that will allow this to be achieved; and the involvement of all relevant institutional participants;
- Research centres and other players should be approached to help provide the required specialist knowledge;
- Authorities should be identified who can provide consultancy and technical assistance, as well as help with consolidating data bases, by means of support from regional and international organizations, developing and exchanging best practice and methodology for intervention activities that will guarantee rigour in gathering and analysing information.

Developing knowledge about the media

- Encourage research into the relationship between the media and violence, childhood and adolescence. Evaluate the processes for intervention which make use of the media, in ways that make it possible to define the results of specific experiences and determine what works and what does not, in each case. Every communications strategy should be evaluated;

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- Document experiences that are known to have had an impact on those who prepared the communications, and in some cases that have affected their relationship with the audience;
- Promote understanding of new technologies are an emerging theme to underpin better understanding of the relationship that children and adolescents establish with these new instruments and systems for distributing and sharing information, and with the communications media as such;
- Those responsible for generating information must learn from the experiences of national and international organizations in order to put the fight against violence as part of the public agenda at a national and local level;
- Research processes should be promoted which incorporate the participation, opinions and needs of children and adolescents at all stages.

