



Portfolio sample by Stacy Dry Lara

Violence Against Children - A Major Threat To Our Global Development September 26, 2014

Violence against children is never justifiable and is a pathetic human rights violation with dire consequences for its victims. Children who survive must cope with terrible emotional, and often, physical scars. The violence weakens their ability to learn and grow into productive adults. HRC27 held a panel discussion on accelerating global efforts to end violence against children -- all panelists agreed that violence against children cuts across every boundary no matter the child's domicile, race, class, religion or culture; or whether their country is rich or poor.

All panelists subscribe to the idea that States, local governments and civil society together play a vital role in efforts to end violence against children. But, what resonated with me most was the continued reference to contributions that can be made by individuals, people just like you and me, who have an immense influence over eradicating these acts against our world's children. As FAWCO members we are more than 15,000 strong and, standing together as one in our various corners of the world, we can individually make contributions to ending violence against children -- our world's resources. So, I ask kindly that as you read short highlights of the panelists presentation, please consider your surroundings, your community, and next time you are out maybe you will see things a little differently. Ask yourself...can I alone, backed by my 15,000 FAWCO colleagues, make a difference to the children, any child, that I see?

Moderating the discussion was Susan Bissell, Associate Director, Child Protection, Programme Division, United Nations Children's Fund. The panelists were Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children; Pavel Astakhov, Russian Ombudsman on the Rights of the Child; Benyam Dawit Mezmur, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Chairperson of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Associate Professor of Law, Community Law Centre, University of Western Cape, South Africa; Fatiha Hadj Salah, medical doctor from Algeria; Jorge Freyre, Latin American and Caribbean Movement for Children; and Laila Khondkar, Save the Children-Liberia.

The opening statement was made by Jane Connors, Director, Research and Right to Development Division, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), who stressed that violence against children takes many forms, including rape, torture, early and child marriages, killings, and trafficking; often various forms of violence overlapped. She voiced concern that the violence occurs where children should find most refuge such as at home and school.

Ms. Bissell said violence against children was not only a matter of global importance but also an issue relevant to each and every State representative in the room. She reported that homicide took the lives of about 95K children and adolescents, under 20 in 2012 alone. She believes that violence is not inevitable saying that recent research has brought a deeper understanding of strategies to prevent and respond to the challenges that children faced.

In her position as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children Ms. Pais, promotes the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children in the justice setting, in the home, in institutional care, in schools, in the workplace and in the community. She told the

assembly that her mandate takes her to the worst and the best of humankind. She explained that the worst is certainly the countless cases of children enduring extreme violence in pervasive, hidden and concealed situations intentionally targeted in politically driven processes and instrumentalized in organized crime. She emphasized the “golden opportunity” of the post-2015 development agenda saying that it is critical to preserve the elimination of violence against children as a distinct target in the sustainable development goals.

Mr. Astakhov spoke about Russia’s broad-based national program to prevent violence against children and rehabilitate victims; and the new technologies being developed for both prevention and rehabilitation. He explained that Russia has regional programs to prevent and detect cases of violence against children at an early stage and that federal law guarantees free assistance whether medical or social for under age victims. Mr. Astakhov said that mediation is being developed to deal with family disputes, especially underprivileged families and their children. In Russia there is the presumption that a child is in a helpless situation until the age of 12 and that the State provides a lawyer for the child if necessary. He also explained that there is continued concern that Russian children were at risk of violence in the United States, for various reasons, and a monitoring group had been set up to look into this phenomenon.

Mr. Mezmur said that Africa, although diverse, faces similar challenges as the rest of the world in terms of its response to violence against children. He reported that children often refuse to leave school during holidays because during this time at home they face the highest risks of being subjected to female genital mutilation. Although civil society organizations are important, he urged States to do more and not rely so heavily on civil society activities.

Ms. Salah, stressed the vital role doctors play in detecting and ending violence against children. To better identify violence and aid to ending the crime, she said that actions of health care professionals should include screening for violence against children; training, information and education of the public and other stakeholders; education and parental awareness; advice for childcare professionals; the collection of epidemiological evidence to assess the problem so that child protection policies can be developed; partnering with other national or international organizations; research to better understand the causes of this phenomenon.

Mr. Freyre, whose group is under the regional plan of the Global Movement for Children (GMC) told the panel that Latin America was the most dangerous region in the world for children and said that States had the main responsibility for ensuring that children were protected from violence. The Global Movement for Children (GMC) aims at uniting efforts from organizations, people and children to build a world fit for children. The GMC was created as a result of the outstanding success of the “Say Yes for Children” campaign which led to the UN Special Session on Children in 2002 resolving to help mobilize citizens of every nation families, communities, civil society, organizations of every kind and children within an active, influential and united movement. At present, the GMC is led by a coalition of the largest organizations and networks focused on children composed at a global level by ENDA Tiers Monde, Plan International, RED LAMYC, Save the Children, UNICEF and World Vision.

In her statement, Ms. Khondkar said that it is a States obligation to protect and respect the right of children to express their views because, when provided with the opportunity and support, children made significant contributions to decisions affecting their lives. She went on to say that key strategies for providing effective protection included providing children with information, encouraging them to articulate their concerns, and introducing safe and accessible mechanisms for challenging violence and

abuse. To date, the right to participation of children remains “patchy, with many countries showing little sustained commitment to creating the legislative, policy and cultural changes necessary for participation to become a reality for all children.” Ms. Khondkar called for States to enact the legislation that recognized the right of children to express themselves freely.

Following the panelists compelling statements were comments by concerned countries. Here are a few:

Philippines, speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, said that the Association attached great importance to intensifying efforts to promote the rights of children, and protect them from violence and abuses. Mindful of the need for a multidisciplinary approach, in 2013 a declaration had been adopted on the elimination of violence against women and children in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations region. European Union said that it was committed to ensuring that children were protected from all forms of violence, be it at home, in school, cyberspace or anywhere else.

Timor-Leste, speaking on behalf of Portuguese-speaking countries, said the prevention of violence against children was important. A project entitled “Street Children, Inclusion and Insertion” intended to promote the rights of the child and support education and health in Portuguese countries.

Paraguay had adopted the Embrace Programme to deal with families and provide financial benefits to families in financial difficulties.

Save the Children International said in a joint statement that 25 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the majority of States still failed to fulfil their human rights obligation to prohibit and eliminate violence against children. States should enact and ensure enforcement of laws that banned all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment; invest in prevention in all contexts; bring perpetrators to justice; and end impunity.

Mexico said that this issue had to be analyzed as a collective issue caused by social and economic settings. The Supreme Court of Mexico recently submitted a protocol of conduct for law enforcement personnel dealing with children. Mexico was committed to prevent bullying and raise this issue at the international level.

Thanks for reading – until the next blog Stacy Dry Lara.

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