

Message from Marta Santos Pais
Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children

On the occasion of the anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the initiative on World Day for the Prevention of Abuse and Violence against Children (WWSF initiative)¹

The protection of children from all forms of violence has long been an area of grave concern for the international community. As a result, significant standards have been established in recent years to ensure children's protection from abuse and violence, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and on Children in Armed Conflict.

Despite these efforts, violence and abuse continue to be a harsh reality for millions of children around the world. Available research leads us to believe that between 500 million and 1,5 billion children worldwide endure some form of violence every year. Violence against children remains hidden and socially accepted, and it has serious and lifelong impacts on the lives of children, compromising children's physical and emotional health, their development and education, and undermining opportunities for their participation in social life.

Sexual violence is associated with stigma and concealed suffering; it leads to unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and a high risk of exposure to HIV infection both for boys and girls. Although being an egregious violation of children's rights, sexual violence and abuse are particularly difficult to survey as a result of their sensitive nature. Available data are scant and fragmented, national studies are scarce and reporting remains weak and difficult.

I welcome the commemoration of the initiative on World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse and Violence against Children, promoted in synergy with the international day for the Rights of the Child and the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This anniversary reminds us that much more needs to be done and that prevention is key in protecting children from violence in all its forms. Guided by this sense of urgency and action, in my mandate as Special Representative of the Secretary General on

Violence against Children, I am committed to pursue three critical goals:

- ✓ the development in each State of a national comprehensive strategy to prevent and respond to all forms of violence;
- ✓ the introduction of a legal ban on all forms of violence against children, and;
- ✓ the promotion of a national data collection system and research agenda.

These are fields where there have been positive developments on which we can build upon. The significant legal reforms introduced in different countries of the world to prohibit all forms of violence against children illustrate this well – at present, twenty-nine countries have a comprehensive and explicit legal ban and many others are working towards the same end. Several countries have reinforced their legislation to address specific forms of violence and to protect children from ill treatment and abuse in schools, from child trafficking and sexual exploitation, as well as harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and early and forced marriage

I would like to commend the Women's World Summit Foundation and its international coalition members and partners around the world for their constant commitment to the elimination of child abuse and violence. Their awareness raising and social mobilization initiatives for the prevention of all forms of child abuse and violence provide a critical support to my global mandate and to the implementation of the recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children.

¹ *The World Day for Prevention of Abuse and Violence against Children – 19 November – and the international coalition organizing events and activities on that day were created in 2000 by WWSF – Women's World Summit Foundation.*