

**10th Anniversary Commemoration of the adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Universal Ratification Campaign Launch**

1. **Today is a day of celebration!**
* **We commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption** by the GA of the Optional Protocols (OPs) to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which strengthened international law for the protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation
* **We commemorate the wide ratification of the OP on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography by countries in all regions –** the Protocol is in force in 137 countries and many others States are working towards this end
* **and we welcome the significant implementation steps** **being undertaken at the national level** to prevent violence and the sexual exploitation of children, to protect victims and witnesses, and to fight impunity for these child rights violations
* **Over the past few years, the international community has reaffirmed commitments** to promote the ratification of the Protocol and to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation **–** including more recently, during the **Rio de Janeiro** World Congress against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, and a week ago during **The Hague** Child Labour Conference. These commitments need to be translated into action!
* **Worldwide advocacy, awareness raising and social mobilisation initiatives** have been promoted by **civil society** organizations, by **children and young people**, and also by the **private sector** to break the silence around these child rights violation and press for policy action to prevent children’s abuse and exploitation.
1. **These are important developments we want to celebrate.** **But today’s event is also a strong reminder** **of the many challenges that remain and of the urgency to act!**

Every year, **millions of children** continue to be sold into marriage, illegal adoption, forced labour, prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation. Largely invisible, stigmatised by society, marginalised by their families, still too often criminalised and deprived of liberty, **they are not only victims of exploitation, but also of silence and indifference**. They remain a low priority in the policy agenda, are by-passed by social investment, ignored by statistical information and excluded from the public debate. **For these millions of children, the time for celebration has not yet arrived!** We feel pressed by the urgency of their cause and the opportunity to make a difference.



This is why we are joining hands in the launch of a wide campaign for the universal ratification of the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. **The time for action is now!**

1. **With universal ratification,** **the protection of children from sexual exploitation will become a global priority, not only as a moral concern but as a legal imperative.**

With universal ratification there will be a shared normative foundation to guide concerted efforts, to prevent any loophole in child protection systems and to fight impunity within and across borders. With universal ratification, there will be no safe haven for perpetrators.

1. **But ratification cannot simply be a symbolic gesture!**

**For this reason, the campaign is also a reminde that ratification marks the solemn start of a never ending process of change and improvement. The Protocol provides vital guidance** **for this process of implementation.**

* **It calls on legislative reforms** to prohibit and criminalise the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; to safeguard the rights of child victims, and to promote their recovery and reintegration;
* **It requires child sensitive services and well trained staff**, for children to seek counselling and advice and report on violations of their rights without fear of reprisal.
* **To overcome the clandestine and transnational nature of these crimes, and fight impunity within and across borders**, it promotes international cooperation and mutual assistance between judicial bodies and law enforcement agencies.
* **And to break the cycle of child marginalisation and exploitation, it underscores the role of prevention**, and promotes the **association of civil society and the involvement of children and adolescents** in awareness raising, information and education initiatives, in order to leverage support for the protection of children from sale and sexual exploitation.



1. **The agenda may seem demanding and daunting, but with strong political will, change is within reach.**

Withthe sound normative foundation provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols and with the important lessons we have learnt from the implementation of these children’s rights standards, we have a critical reference to accelerate progress in the steps ahead.

I feel deeply encouraged by the presence here today of such a decisive and influential group of Member States Representatives and child rights advocates, and also by the support the global campaign is generating across regions. I look forward to joining hands with you in achieving universal ratification of the Optional Protocol within the very near future. And I am confident that, with your strong support, we will be able to celebrate also soon the start of a new era for the millions of children we have failed to protect so far!