



High Level Cross-Regional Meeting on the Protection of Children from Sexual Violence

co-organised by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children and the Council of Europe

Strasbourg, 18-19 June 2015

Statement by the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, Maud de Boer-Buquicchio

Official Opening Session, 18 June

Deputy Secretary General, dear Gabriella,
Special Representative, dear Marta
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am particularly happy to be back at the Council of Europe, “my second” home for many years. It is 9 years ago that I launched, in my previous capacity as Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Programme “Building a Europe for and with children” and I am glad to see the impressive results achieved and the mobilization it has generated.

Let me also thank the Council of Europe for hosting this year’s Cross-Regional Meeting and for the commitment the Organisation has continued to show to and indeed invest in children’s rights. I also wish to thank the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children, my dear friend Marta, for convening and being at the heart of this Cross-Regional Meeting dedicated to the issue of sexual violence against children.

This truly global event is a unique opportunity to gather regional organisations and institutions to share experiences of both good practices and challenges, and to strengthen our response to the scourge that is sexual violence against children, one of the ugliest and most devastating forms of violence.



Indeed there is no doubt that regional arrangements play an important role in promoting and protecting human rights. They are fundamental to guarantee the rights of the child, due to their proximity to the reality on the ground and the impact of their policies, strategies and decisions. What is more, the work of regional organisations reinforces and promotes universal human rights standards.

Meetings like this are also an occasion to increase the interactions and cooperation between relevant regional mechanisms and the UN human rights mechanisms.

The adoption of the Addis Ababa Roadmap in 2012 on cooperation and the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights with the UN special procedures mechanisms is an excellent example on how such cooperation can be framed and monitored. The special procedures from the HRC and the ACHPR have issued joint public statements and press releases, conducted awareness raising events together and endeavoured to follow-up on recommendations formulated by both mechanisms. As a recent example, in the context of the 15th anniversary of the OPSC, the SRSG on VAC, together with the Chairperson of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Rapporteur on the Rights of the Child of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, UNICEF and myself addressed a letter to Member States which have not yet ratified this core international treaty. This is a tangible example of cooperation to further one of our goals, namely the promotion of the ratification of all these invaluable international and regional human rights instruments.

Noting the joint declaration on the reinforcement of the cooperation between the Secretariat of the Council of Europe and the OHCHR, including the special procedures, the biannual Resolution adopted last December by the GA (Res.A/69/83) on cooperation between the UN and the Council of Europe, likewise encourages close collaboration between the various UN mechanisms dedicated to children's rights, such as UNICEF, the SRSG on VAC, the OHCHR and the CRC and the Council of Europe.

Enhanced and concrete cooperation between UN agencies and mechanisms and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, in the area of promotion and protection of children's rights is called for in the GA Resolution of December last year. (Res. A/69/110)

I hope that today' and tomorrow's platform will provide further incentives for all Regions to structure their cooperation with UN agencies and entities in the same spirit. There is indeed further space to regularly share information, coordinate activities and conduct joint actions. The UN human rights mechanisms and regional mechanisms deliver an impressive amount of recommendations, interpretations and standards. We should ensure that these efforts do not go unused or duplicated. A more consistent presence of key global actors such as the SRSGs, Special Procedures mandate holders, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and UNICEF in regional fora is an important step.

Another possibility of cooperation in the context of my mandate would be to undertake joint country visits with matching regional mechanisms.

Moreover, regional standards can complement further international human rights standards. I take as an example, in the framework of the Council of Europe, the Lanzarote Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse which ensures

additional protection to the one provided by the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC). The GA has in this context acknowledged the contribution of the COE to the development of international law and noted the openness of the Council of Europe to the participation of States of other regions to its legal instruments.

Deputy Secretary General, distinguished delegates,

Last year we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and this year we are marking 15 years since the adoption of its two first Optional Protocols. Besides, 2015 is also the 25 years since my mandate was created. Throughout this period we have, through our concerted efforts, been able to bring greater visibility to the rights of the child and the abhorrent abuses children suffer. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, children are more vulnerable than ever.

The subject of our meeting is undeniably timely, with sexual violence against children constantly brought to our attention. As I felt during my first country visit, violence at home and specifically sexual violence are too often ignored and hidden by a veil of secrecy and due to a lack of awareness, as well as persistent gender inequality.

The first thematic session is consequently of the upmost importance since, to our greatest dismay, sexual abuse in the circle of trust is both the most frequent and the most underreported. I look forward to the preliminary conclusions of the Lanzarote Committee's monitoring work on this very subject. Besides, It would be interesting to consider including in our understanding of the circle of trust the grooming of children through ICT's by individuals exterior to the family who by wooing the child, persuade him or her that they have an intimate and privileged relationship.

Indeed, the opportunities and challenges created by ICTs should be at the centre of our preoccupations and I welcome the focus of the second thematic session. Likewise, my first thematic study was dedicated to the issue of ICTs and the sale and sexual exploitation of children.

Throughout this research, it became clear that there are protection gaps and a need for a comprehensive global legal framework and law enforcement. Indeed, perpetrators can too often repeat their unspeakable actions in different countries by taking advantage of the incomplete criminalisation of specific exploitative activities.

To successfully remedy these gaps, an effective international cooperation framework must be fostered. There are already good examples at the international level in the domain of enforcement such as the Virtual Global Taskforce and the Global Alliance against Child Sexual Abuse Online. Additional political will has also led to the launching of the We#PROTECT initiative by the United Kingdom, bringing together key stakeholders ranging from government authorities, international law enforcement, civil society and the technology sector. The main challenge lies in expanding access to the knowledge, methods and tools successfully used by these initiatives to all regions of the world, adapting the means to their needs and specific characteristics of the phenomena at the national and regional levels.

I believe that there exists further room for solid international cooperation in the fight against sexual violence both online and offline. States and the international community would benefit

from strengthening either these alliances or establishing a new permanent framework which could reach all UN members. This permanent framework would focus not only on cooperation in law enforcement and exchange of good practices, but also in capacity building of countries that are willing to effectively combat sexual violence against children.

Therefore, I hope that the third thematic session will provide us with the possibility to further discuss these ideas and place our emphasis on concrete implementation. I look forward to these upcoming two days and call upon us to remember that ultimately we have one goal: to protect and save our children, not because they **are** our future but because they are entitled to **have** a better present and a promising future.

Deputy Secretary General and distinguished delegates,

One of our main challenges in successfully tackling sexual violence against children is the absence of comprehensive disaggregated data. Without precise information we are unable to truly apprehend the scale and the nature of the phenomenon and calibrate our response. We should consequently foster, in our different capacities, the creation at the national level of sound data collecting mechanisms.

Moreover, the lack of child friendly reporting mechanisms and justice systems are a further hurdle to the effective identification of child victims and prosecution of perpetrators. There are numerous good practices and guidelines to remedy this challenge. I take this opportunity to refer you to the Study on safe and child-sensitive counselling, complaint and reporting mechanism to address violence against children which was jointly produced by my predecessor and the Office of the SRSG on violence against children. The Guidelines on Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime elaborated by the UN Economic and Social Council in 2005 are an additional document to take into account. Finally, the Council of Europe 's Recommendation on Child-Friendly Justice is an additional source of inspiration.

Creating a safe online environment, which is at the heart of the work of the SRSG on violence against children, should indeed be a priority. Child participation is a core component of this safe environment since after all children are at the forefront of the use of ICTs. The involvement of children in reporting abuse both online and offline is fundamental and can be achieved through targeted awareness raising. I take this opportunity to flag the excellent work undertaken by ECPAT in this domain such as through their guide "Stay Safe from Online Sexual Exploitation". Additionally, the voice of children should be heard and taken into account when we are designing or consolidating child protection systems and developing a culture of respect for children's rights.

A final challenge which is at the centre of my work is the support given to children victim of sexual violence to allow for their recovery and rehabilitation. That is why my next thematic study will be dedicated to the impact of these crimes in order to propose effective and child-centred care and recovery measures for victims. We must push at our different levels for integrated child protection systems which guarantee prevention, facilitate reporting mechanisms, provide assistance throughout the legal process and crucially ensure rehabilitation.

Let me conclude by sharing the wisdom of Nelson Mandela who rightly said that "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The truth is that millions of children continue to suffer from violence that we can never justify and can always prevent. Children's rights make societies grow. I am confident that the Post 2015 development agenda will help us to put the priorities right, for the benefit and with the involvement of children around the world.

Deputy Secretary General, dear Gabriella, Special Representative, dear Marta, distinguished delegates, I thank you for your attention.