



General Assembly

Distr.: General
22 February 2010

English only

Human Rights Council

Thirteenth session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights,
civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 February 2010]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

A matter of urgency: preventing violence against children

The Association Comunita' Papa Giovanni XXIII (Pope John the 23rd) runs 298 family-homes in 25 countries on 5 continents around the world. These family-homes welcome many children and youth, who have suffered different kinds of violence and abuses either in their natural families or in institutions or in their local communities and on the streets. In the family-home children find a substitute caring family that tries on a daily basis to help them to recover from their wounds in collaboration with the social services and professionals (medical doctors, psychologists, nurses etc.).

The Association is also involved on a daily basis in rescuing women, many of them under 18 years of age and coming from countries such as Nigeria, Romania, Albania, from human trafficking and from being forced into a life of prostitution.

In the street children projects run by the Association in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, in the daily centres for youth and in the therapeutic communities for drug addicts all around the world, a great proportion of children and youth have experienced directly in their past or have been at risk of experiencing physical, sexual, social violence.

In regular visitation to youth in the juvenile prisons, the members of the Association have heard the painful stories of violence to which these youth have been subjected, which are a major contributing factor to their acts of delinquency.

The volunteers of the Association in Uganda have witnessed the awful phenomenon of the child soldiers.

The volunteers of "Operation Dove", a non-violent peace corps of the Association present in South Hebron Hills in Cisgiordania, who are doing school patrol, report on a regular basis the fear of school going children subjected to threat by the settlers.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the members of the Association have encountered children that have received severe corporal punishment in schools and have been sexually abused, among other reasons, for the wrong belief that having sex with young girls cures and prevents AIDS, or for the mere fact of being mentally disabled.

As the report of the UN Independent Expert, Mr Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, and the World Report on Violence against Children, clearly state: "violence against children exists in every country of the world, cutting across culture, education, income and ethnic origin and is socially approved and frequently legal and State-authorized". Such violence is often hidden, under-reported and under-recorded.

Often, even if national laws to protect the rights of children are in place, harmful cultural practices like, female genital mutilation, corporal punishment in families and schools, still prevail.

Children are vulnerable to violence, but there are some who are even more vulnerable, in particular the un-born child, the physically and mentally disabled, the girl child, street kids, displaced children, children of migrants and ethnic minorities. All the contexts may be risky, but, there are situations in which violence and exploitation of children occur most, like wars, natural disasters and extreme poverty. One example is the alarming reports from Haiti where children disappear and fall victims of trafficking.

There are no words to describe the suffering and the traumas of children who are victims of violence.

The consequences of any violence, especially sexual abuse, are well known: behaviour disturbances, anxiety, depression, social, emotional, cognitive impairments, tendencies to health-risk behaviours such as drug and alcohol abuse, early sexual activity, aggressive behaviour.

Even if later in life these children encounter adults who love them, care for them and represent a good role model for them, the deep psychological wounds provoked by violence remain in them and ache forever.

It is a matter of urgency to prevent violence of any kind against children.

It is a matter of urgency to let the actual violence on children come into the open.

It is matter of urgency to hear directly the voices of children, to involve them, to take into account their suggestions to stop violence.

In this regard, the interventions of the Association Comunita' Papa Giovanni XXIII in the different nations are oriented to:

- Prevent violence and abuse against minors in order to protect them from negative experiences that compromise their dignity, rights and physical, psychological and spiritual growth.
- Welcome children and adolescents who are victims of violence y creating for them in open families and family-homes, a conducting family environment which can help their healing.
- Remove the root causes of violence either in the family or in a larger social context by carrying on an attentive and detailed analysis of such contexts in cooperation with the social welfare services.
- Promote education and raise awareness on the respect of the rights of children.

Preventing and fighting violence against children is everyone's responsibility in society. Nevertheless, Governments have the primary duty to protect children from any form of violence and exploitation because of their legislative, administrative, judicial, policymaking, service delivery and institutional functions.

Recalling Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Optional protocols on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography; the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol as well as the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol; the Convention against Torture and other Cruel Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishing and its Optional Protocol; the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and the members of their Families; the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol among other international hard and soft laws, in order to prevent violence against children, the Association Comunita' Papa Giovanni XXIII invites the States Parties to:

- All ratify (e.g. USA, Somalia) the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols if not yet done so, considering also that this year is the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the two Optional Protocols.
- Comply with the international obligations by formulating domestic laws in conformity with them if this is not yet done by the States.
- Prioritise prevention of violence against children by addressing the major risk factors such as family breakdown, lack of parent-child attachment, abuse of alcohol and drugs, poverty, unemployment, etc.

- Develop guidelines for the media for the respect of children s' rights which encourage non-violent messages and combat child pornography on the Internet.
- Develop an effective system which can assure registration at birth, marriage certificates and identity of children.
- Put in place an adequate monitoring system to record and report violence against children with disaggregated data in terms of sex, age, etc.
- Develop an action plan for the full implementation of the UN Guidelines on Alternative Care approved by consensus on 20 November 2009 at the General Assembly which involves the participation of children, families and communities.
- Develop policies of social, economic and psychological support to families in difficulty and/or poverty-stricken as well as supporting healthy, stable natural families and fostering/substitutive families (e.g. family.homes) since these can be a powerful source of protection from violence of children in all settings. .
- Combat human trafficking and forced prostitution of young girls by punishing the clients who seek such their labour or sexual services since the clients constitute the demand that makes the racket and trafficking flourish.
- To ensure that non person below 18 years of age will be subjected to the death penalty or a sentence of life imprisonment without possibility of release.

Lastly, the Association Comunita' Papa Giovanni XXIII expresses its concern about a very widespread and silently accepted- even approved- violence against children: the killing of the unborn child or induced abortion.

As a Catholic organisation, the Association is on the forefront to defend life from its conception. The Association even promotes the adoption of frozen embryos. Indeed, some of its members have already expressed their availability for the so called "pre-natal adoption".

Fully aware of the controversial international debate on the issue of abortion and right to life, the Association makes an appeal to the Member States to use the flexibility offered by the Convention on the Rights of the Child to extend protection of life from its conception. In fact, in its preamble at the 9th paragraph, the Convention states "Bearing in mind that, as indicated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth".

Since human rights are universal, indivisible, inalienable and interdependent, the international UN "family" should find ways of promoting and protecting the rights of women without violating the rights of children.
