

**SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF  
THE SECOND ARAB AFRICAN CONFERENCE  
ON SEXUAL ABUSE, EXPLOITATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN**

*Rabat, Morocco, 14-16 December 2004*

Morocco hosted, under the High patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Arab African conference on sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against children (Rabat, Morocco 14-16 December 2004). This conference was organised by the State Secretary in charge of the Family, childhood and the disabled persons with the support of UNICEF, ECPAT, the NGO Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO.

Over fifty countries and twenty NGOs representing three regions: North Africa and the Middle East, East and South Africa, Western and Central Africa.

This meeting was convened within the framework initiated in:

- Stockholm (August 1996), to act against the phenomenon of sexual exploitation of Children (CSE), to act together (government, civil society, international organisations...);
- And pursued in Rabat in October 2001, where the present countries committed themselves to implement action plans to prevent and eradicate this phenomenon;
- Followed by the Yokohama conference (December 2001) encouraging countries to effectively honour their commitments.

Based on the outcome, we can only be optimistic with regard to what has been accomplished:

- Several countries signed and ratified international conventions;
- Numerous countries set up Focal Point ministries with the task to coordinate actions (23 out of 24 countries in western and centre Africa);
- Some countries implemented a national action plan;
- Several countries deployed laudable effort in terms harmonizing their legislation with the international legal instruments;
- Certain countries have specific legislations (child and family codes);
- In some cases, measures have been taken to implement legislation.

Our meeting today is marked by an intense participation and involvement to the conference proceedings of several ministers, high officials, and actors from the civil society.

This indeed highlights the interest given by the three regions with regard to the urgency to act against the causes and the consequences of CSE.

The analysis of the situation reveals a strong complexity of this phenomenon through its multiform aspects, difficulties of approach and intervention methodologies due, among other things, to the weight of silence and the predominance of cultural factors.

The human cost of these forms of exploitation is dramatic essentially for the children, standard bearers of the future.

The diagnosis also highlights the factors that cause and contribute to this phenomenon: poverty, anarchic urbanization, armed conflicts, migration, HIV/AIDS, sexual tourism and harmful customs/traditions...

Aggravating effects result from change in sociological contexts through family dislocation, the breaking of traditional solidarity structures and new alienating consumption behaviours.

Despite a general awareness and numerous States' commitments, a fully fledged fighting action against this phenomenon is becoming urgent.

### **Who must act? How and when?**

The paramount importance of qualitative and quantitative knowledge of this phenomenon in terms of back up and appropriate answers provided, requires the mobilization of all intervening parties, be them national or development aid organisms in order to strengthen the States' abilities to implement various policies and adequate mechanisms.

Various speeches and ideas debated during this meeting highlighted actions to be taken in order to consolidate what has been accomplished.

#### **1. Concept and definitions**

- Devise a clear and precise definition of the various dimensions of the phenomenon,
- Conceive and devise specific approaches in response to all contributing or revealing factors,
- Take into consideration in the conceptual and factual analysis specific dimensions: religion, culture...
- Evaluate the phenomenon with regard to vulnerability dimensions and impact, including gender approach.

## **2. Ratifications, legislations**

- Call for a general ratification of conventions in the three regions (optional protocol CRC, 182 ILO convention, optional protocol on trans-border regarding people trafficking, particularly women and children);
- Legally define the phenomenon through a general definition linked to the violence and abuse and a specific one regarding children sexual exploitation;
- To set up a mechanism in charge of monitoring the compatibility of legal instruments with international norms and the effective implementation of laws.

## **3. National plans of action**

- To take into consideration, while defining specific and general national plans of action all the dimensions and aspects of the phenomenon;
- Consider child protection as a priority to sustainable development (make it part of strategic plans aiming to poverty reduction, etc)

## **4. Situation analysis and evaluation**

- Strengthen states' capacity to devise situation analysis indexes;
- Involve universities and research centres in quantitative and qualitative analysis/evaluation;
- Develop data and experiences exchange mechanisms so as to follow up and monitor the phenomenon evolution at the national and trans-border levels.

## **5. Inform and sensitise children**

- Enhance children access to information to reinforce their self-defence abilities;
- Give credibility, within legal institutions, to children's witnessing and statements and use listening skills adapted to children;
- Set up monitoring structures dedicated to children in highly risky situations (disabled children, children in armed conflicts, street children...);
- Importance of the child/child relation.

## **6. Act to reduce and punish the phenomenon**

- Develop more identification and monitoring instruments of CSE networks;
- Penalize all abuse and sexual aggressions on children (qualify each case);
- Penalize acts by severe and dissuasive sanctions;
- Make sure that States respect their international commitments particularly with regard to the implementation of the extraterritoriality principle of crimes against children;
- Identify and zero in on risky areas, the most vulnerable children groups and the profile of potential abusers.

## **7. Capacities and resources strengthening**

- Involve the media in protection strategies: support, awareness raising and code of conduct...;

- Consolidate information and communication means at the grassroots level (school, youth houses, community spaces...);
- Adopt and implement interdisciplinary intensive training actions focusing on listening skills and care for the victims. These training programs must zero in on all those in charge of children protection (judges, lawyers, educators and social workers, teachers, security agents, wardens, customs' agents, etc).

#### **8. Extend and strengthen partnership**

- Strengthen partnership between public authorities and civil society by reinforcing NGOs' capacities in fighting CSE;
- The partnership must be multi-sectorial and multi-dimensional: within and across the public administration, the police, justice system, educational corps, social workers, medical corps, professional corps, elected officials etc.

The implementation of these mechanisms aiming to reinforce institutional intervention capacity requires from the States to allocate important financial resources.

International cooperation should intervene more in supporting national and regional strategies at the financial and technical levels in order to provide a global answer against this phenomenon,

Various speeches and debates on sexual abuse, exploitation and violence against children stressed that fighting this scourge is a human urgency and asked to:

- ✓ Break the law of silence;
- ✓ Listen and give credibility to children's statements;
- ✓ Incorporate children in the decision-making process;
- ✓ Give back children their dignity and future.

With regard to the progress accomplished and to deficiency requirements, participating states are invited to:

- ✓ Engage to share the conference's recommendations at the national level;
- ✓ Identify actions to be implemented in a way to enact this meeting's recommendations;
- ✓ Share these actions with the organizers for a more effective evaluation and follow up.