



International Advocacy Reports and Statements

13th Human Rights Council

March 2010, Geneva

Written by Katerina Veverkova, IFUW Volunteer

The Human Rights Council (HRC), at its 13th session, dedicated a day of discussion to children's rights issue. This year, State delegates, NGOs, UN agencies and individual experts gathered to discuss the issue of sexual violence against children.

The main goal of the discussion was to raise awareness about the question of sexual violence against children, reaffirm existing standards and commitments, highlight good practices and discuss challenges for future work.

During the morning presentations, Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative to the Secretary General on Violence against Children, outlined the dangers of sexual violence on children. She discussed physical and psychological effects of such violence that can have long term consequences. Although national studies are incomplete and there is a lack of data, it is clear that that sexual assault to children is not limited to certain regions but affects all areas of the world. A survey on sexual violence in Swaziland showed that one in three girls has experienced some sort of sexual violence. Orphans and children from very poor families were at greater risk and in 75 per cent of cases, the perpetrators were well known to victims. There are no reporting mechanisms and advice to victims available. For the future, it is necessary to gather more data, identify the children who are at most risk, enforce relevant legislation and establish mechanisms for reporting and seeking advice.

The following speaker Tim Ekesa, of the Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children, added that in some East Africa regions the sexual violence against children is encouraged by cultural traditions. Children are not safe at schools and educational facilities. Adults often request sexual favors for help offered to children in need. Offenders continue to teach and their abusive continue because the judicial procedures are very slow. Sometimes they legalize their abuse by marrying the victims. He emphasized the necessity of collective effort of private and public sector and quick action to help the victims.

Special Reporter on Torture, Manfred Nowak, said that more than one million children around the world are in detention and the number is still rising. These children are most likely to become a subject to violence by officers and by other detainees in such institutions. Corporal punishment is still legal in more than 80 countries. In addition, children are placed in the same facilities as adults, which puts them in a very high risk of abuse. There are no legal or medical services to substantiate children's claims. Moreover, children are placed in such detention centers also when they are in need of protection for examples victims of crimes.

International Federation of University Women

Fédération Internationale des Femmes Diplômées des Universités

10, rue du Lac, CH-1207 Geneva, Switzerland; Tel: (+41 22) 731 23 80; Fax: (+41 22) 738 04 40

E-mail: ifuw@ifuw.org Website: <http://www.ifuw.org>

Legislation in many states covers only sex offences against girls and sexual violence against boys stays out of the law. In order to end sexual violence against children, there must be clear policies about children in detention. The institutional detention of children should be used as last resort, and must be for the shortest possible time. All children must be removed from facilities with adults. Complaints and monitoring systems must also be established.

Lena Karlsson, of Save the Children, spoke of the particular vulnerability of children on the move. Border crossing makes children vulnerable to sexual violence as they often become subject to forced sex with guides or border guards. The unclear status of the children on the move creates an obstacle for accessing education or other services. Further studies on this subject and engaging men in the fight against violence are necessary to combat it.

Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, spoke about sexual violence against children in conflict situations. Rape of children or women is often used as a tactic or an instrument of war to terrorize targeted population. Sexual offenders are not held accountable due to a climate of impunity created by a war.

Short presentations of state delegates and NGOs followed emphasizing their commitment to the Convention of on the Rights of the Child and challenges in the particular state or field of work.