



Tackling Violence in Schools:  
A global perspective  
Bridging the gap between standards and practice

**Cover photo:** © UNICEF/NYHQ2007-2780/Palani Mohan

**Caption:** Leeia Rahman, a nine-year-old girl from one of the Orang Asli ethnic groups, raises her hand in class at Tasik Cini Primary School in Tasik Cini Village, Pahang State. To encourage literacy among Orang Asli children, UNICEF and the Ministry of Education are developing textbooks containing Orang Asli folk stories and training Orang Asli teachers in storytelling techniques

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# Tackling Violence in Schools: A global perspective

Bridging the gap between standards and practice



Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General  
on  
Violence against Children



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**Our Classroom Golden Rules:**

*We want our classroom to be clean and tidy.*

*We want everybody to look after our books, cards and other materials.*

*We want everybody to talk quietly, including our teachers.*

*We want everybody to try to do their best work.*

*We want everybody to be kind and friendly to each other.*

*We want everybody to help each other and share.*

*We want everybody to keep their hands to themselves.*

*We want everybody to be safe in the school and playground.*

*Every so often children need to sit and discuss these again.*

Gambella Primary School, Ethiopia<sup>1</sup>

This thematic report was developed to assist partners, including Governments, international organizations, human rights mechanisms, civil society actors, research institutions, teachers' unions and communities, which all have an indispensable role to play in ending all forms of violence against children in and around schools.

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, *Manual. Child Friendly Schools*, p. 19.





## Foreword

Education is a fundamental right of each and every child. It is crucial for children's development, enabling them to cultivate their creative talents and critical thinking, gain life skills, join hands with friends and develop social relations, and grow with dignity, confidence and self-esteem as individuals.

Education has a unique potential to generate an environment where attitudes condoning violence can be changed and non-violent behaviour can be learned. From children's early years, schools are well placed to break patterns of violence and provide skills to communicate, to negotiate and support peaceful solutions to conflicts.

Schools also offer children the possibility of learning and internalizing values of solidarity, tolerance and respect, and they serve as important resources for the promotion of non-violence and for overcoming tension and mediating conflicts, among pupils and staff, and also beyond, in the wider community.

For many children, however, the school environment represents a very different universe, where they may be exposed to violence and may also be taught violence. Playground fighting, verbal abuse, intimidation, humiliation, corporal punishment, sexual abuse, gang violence, or other forms of cruel and humiliating treatment at the hands of teachers and other school staff, are some common expressions of this phenomenon.

For child victims of violence, school can become an ordeal rather than an opportunity. The promise and potential of education and the excitement of discovery and learning are undermined by pain, trauma and fear. In some cases children's academic performance suffers, their health and wellbeing is affected, and their capacity to operate as confident individuals, capable of developing open and trusting relations with others, is compromised. The negative impact of violence in schools goes beyond the children who are directly affected by it. It touches the lives of those who witness it, creating an atmosphere of anxiety and insecurity incompatible with learning. And violence or the threat of violence can even be such that families feel pressed to keep their children out of school, and to encourage school abandonment as a means of preventing further violence and harm. As a result, educational opportunity, with all its benefits for the individual and society, may be seriously hampered.

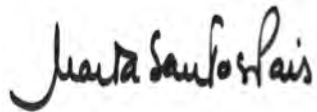
Recognizing the crucial importance of education in safeguarding children's rights, and of violent-free schools as catalysts for non-violence in the communities that they serve, the Norwegian Government, the Council of Europe and my own office joined hands in the organization in June 2011, in Oslo, of an expert consultation on tackling violence in schools.



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This High Level Expert Meeting brought together policy makers, education and children's rights experts, civil society participants and academics, as well as UN agencies and the Council of Europe decision-making bodies.

I am confident that this report, which includes the key conclusions and recommendations of the expert consultation, will be a crucial contribution to raise awareness of the important initiatives promoted across nations to prevent and address violence against children in schools and to mobilize decisive action to accelerate progress in violence prevention and elimination.



Marta Santos Pais  
Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*The education to which every child has a right is one designed to provide the child with life skills, to strengthen the child's capacity to enjoy the full range of human rights and to promote a culture which is infused by appropriate human rights values. The goal is to empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence.*

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child  
General Comment no. 1 (2001): the Aims of Education<sup>2</sup>

Schools are uniquely positioned to deliver the quality education that is the right of every child. They offer children the opportunity to cultivate their creative talents and critical thinking, gain life skills, develop self-esteem and social relations, and grow with dignity as individuals. They also serve as important resources for the development and dissemination of values of non-violence, cooperation, tolerance and respect, not only among pupils and staff, but also beyond, in the wider community.

On any given day, more than one billion children around the world attend school.<sup>3</sup> Many of these children enjoy their right be taught in a safe and stimulating environment. For many others, however, schooling does not guarantee such opportunity. These girls and boys are exposed to bullying, sexual and gender-based violence, corporal punishment and other forms of violence with or without the approval of education authorities. Many are also exposed to schoolyard fighting, gang violence, assault with weapons, and sexual and gender-based violence by their own peers.<sup>4</sup> New manifestations of violence are also affecting children's lives, notably the phenomenon of "cyber-bullying" via mobile phones, computers, websites and social networking sites.

For these children, the potential and promise of schooling is undermined by pain, suffering and fear. In certain cases levels of violence, or the threat of violence, can be such that it keeps children out of school, with the result that educational opportunity, with all its benefits for the individual and society, is seriously hampered or lost.

Given the prevalence of violence in schools, the crucial importance of education in realizing the rights of the child and, moreover, the potential of violence-free schools to act as catalysts for non-violence in the communities that they serve, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children dedicated special attention to this issue in the course of 2011. This has included a high-level expert meeting on "Tackling Violence in Schools", held in Oslo, Norway, from 27 to 28 June 2011, which was jointly organized by the Government of Norway, the Council of Europe and the Office of the Special Representative on Violence against Children. The outcomes of this meeting form an important component of the present

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<sup>2</sup> UN Committee on the Right of the Child, CRC/GC/2001/1, "General Comment No. 1 (2001). Article 29(1): The Aims of Education", §2.

<sup>3</sup> Some 689 million in primary schools and 513 million in secondary schools. UNICEF, *Manual. Child Friendly Schools*, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio, *World Report on Violence against Children*, p. 116.

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report, which seeks to bring together and document the essential aspects of effective initiatives to end violence in schools.

Specifically, drawing from lessons around the world, this report examines six key areas where change can and must be made in order to ensure that every child enjoys her or his right to an education directed to “[t]he development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”, as required under article 29(1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The key areas addressed in this report are: developing holistic, whole-school strategies; building partnerships with children; providing support for teachers and other staff; changing attitudes and addressing social norms; securing children’s legal protection; and consolidating data and research.

The report illustrates each of these six areas with recent initiatives aimed at preventing violence against children. It also gives special attention to the issue of violence in schools from the perspective of children belonging to particularly vulnerable groups, including girls, children with disabilities, belonging to minorities or who are indigenous, refugee children and children who are victims of violence and discrimination as a result of their sexual orientation.

### **The imperative of eradicating violence in schools**

There are at least three compelling arguments for focusing on the issue of violence against children in the school setting.<sup>5</sup> The first relates to the imperative to ensure that each and every child enjoys his or her human rights to the fullest extent. Violence in schools can seriously hamper children’s rights: generally speaking, children who study in a violent environment achieve lower academic results than those who do not,<sup>6</sup> and children who are bullied will often exhibit a marked decline in school achievement and a reluctance to participate in school activities. Moreover, their right to leisure, play and recreation can be compromised as they isolate themselves from other children and lose interest in hobbies and after-school activities. Bullied children’s mental and physical health is also at risk: they may show signs of depression or have problems eating, sleeping or complain of physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach aches.<sup>7</sup> The youngest children are affected by violence most adversely: “[i]t exposes them to brutal treatment from older students who are physically stronger, while causing the young children themselves to become brutalized by a school culture of violence that they [perpetuate] in later years when they move to higher grades.”<sup>8</sup>

Equally, evidence suggests that children who bully others may also suffer from poor mental health. Often they do not outgrow this behaviour and instead carry it into their

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<sup>5</sup> In keeping with the *World Report on Violence against Children*, the term “school” is used in this paper as a generic term for all educational settings for children.

<sup>6</sup> Perezneito, P. C. Harper, B. Clench and J. Coarasa, *The Economic Impact of School Violence*, London, Plan International and Overseas Development institute, p. vi.

<sup>7</sup> Children’s Safety Network, *Preventing Bullying: The Role of Public Health and Safety Professionals*, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Van Leer Foundation, *Person to Person, Maintaining a respectful climate for young children in schools: no trumpet solo – let the orchestra play!* p.1.

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adult personal, family and work relations.<sup>9</sup> This implies associated costs to the individual, those around him or her, and society as a whole.

The negative impact of violence in schools goes beyond the children who are directly affected by it. It also has an insidious effect on pupils who witness it, creating an atmosphere of fear, anxiety and insecurity incompatible with learning. Ultimately violence or the threat of violence may be such that children drop out of school or are kept at home by concerned parents. Consequently it impacts negatively on their chances of working their way out of poverty. A 15-year –old girl from Jalalabad City in Afghanistan recounts an all too common situation:

*[t]wo years ago one of the teachers had beaten one of my classmates very badly. Her mother came to school and complained to the principal. The same teacher got angry with the parent and called her very bad words, and finally the student's mother decided not to let her daughter attend the school. Many other similar events forced students to leave the school. I also wanted to leave but my parents wouldn't let me.*<sup>10</sup>

It is estimated that in Sub-Saharan Africa alone – one of the poorest regions of the world - 10 million children drop out of primary school every year.<sup>11</sup>

The second argument for focusing on violence in schools relates to the social impact of this phenomenon and, inversely, the potential of violence-free schools to make an important contribution to social cohesion. Violence in the education setting both feeds into and is fed by violence in society as a whole. As observed in the *World Report on Violence against Children*, “[w]here the social and physical environment of the community is hostile, the school environment is unlikely to be spared.”<sup>12</sup> In effect, violence in the home, in the school and in the community is a continuum, spilling over from one setting to another.<sup>13</sup> If schools can be established as violence-free environments there is a possibility of creating a new continuum: as the Committee on the Rights of the Child observes in its General Comment no. 8, from 2006 “[a]ddressing the widespread acceptance or tolerance of corporal punishment of children and eliminating it, in the family, schools and other settings, is not only an obligation of States Parties under Convention on the Rights of the Child; it is also a key strategy for reducing and preventing all forms of violence in societies.”<sup>14</sup>

The third argument for taking decisive steps to end violence in schools is linked to the issue of a country's capacity for development and the crucial importance of education in improving living standards for its citizens - children and adults alike - and for

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Save the Children, “Lima – Afghanistan”, Violence Free School project, case study, date of interview 17 January 2011.

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO, *The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education. Summary. Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011*, p.5.

<sup>12</sup> *World Report on Violence against Children*, *ibid* note 4, p. 111.

<sup>13</sup> Antonowicz, Laetitia, *Too Often in Silence. A report on school-based violence in West and Central Africa*, UNICEF, Plan West Africa, Action Aid, Save the Children Sweden, 2010, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/GC/8, “General Comment No 8 (2006). The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment”, §3.

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generations to come. In the United Kingdom, 16-year-olds bullied at school were twice as likely to be without education, employment or training, and to have lower wage levels at age 23 and 33, than those who were not bullied. In turn, young men who are not in education, employment or training, are three times more likely to suffer from depression and five times more likely to have a criminal record.<sup>15</sup> Statistics such as these have a significant impact on national economies. For example, youth violence in Brazil alone is estimated to cost nearly US \$19 billion every year, of which US \$943 million can be linked to violence in schools.<sup>16</sup> The cost to the US economy for violence associated with schools is still higher, at an estimated US \$7.9 billion per year.<sup>17</sup> In Egypt, nearly 7 per cent of potential earnings are lost as a result of school dropout. The economic cost of 65 low-income, middle-income and transition countries failing to educate girls to the same level as boys is US \$92 billion per year.<sup>18</sup>

Getting girls into school and keeping them there is especially important for national development. For example, a study has shown that each year Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria lose US \$974 million, US \$301 million and US \$1,662 million respectively for failing to educate girls to the same standards as boys.<sup>19</sup> Violence in school is one of the most significant factors contributing to the underrepresentation of girls in the education setting. Furthermore, studies demonstrate that, “lower educational attainment rates have generational impacts: for example, low female education is correlated with higher fertility rates, lower health rates for themselves and their children and a worse overall household economy”.<sup>20</sup>

The implications of girls missing out on education are therefore both serious and wide-ranging. It has been calculated, for example, that if the average child mortality rate for Sub-Saharan Africa were to fall to the level associated with children of mothers who have some secondary education, there would be 1.8 million fewer deaths.<sup>21</sup> Ending violence in schools is therefore inherent to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and MDG 2 and 3 in particular (achieving universal primary education and eliminating gender disparity in education), and to UNESCO’s Education for All goal to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015.

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<sup>15</sup> Ellery, F., N. Kassam and Bazan C., *Prevention Pays: the economic benefits of ending violence in schools*, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Perezneito, *ibid*, note 6, p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Plan, *Paying the Price*, 2008, cited in Antonowicz, *ibid*, note 13, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Perezneito, *ibid*, note 6, p. vi.

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO, *ibid*, note 11, p. 5.

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## 2. THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

The *World Report on Violence against Children*<sup>22</sup> was the first comprehensive study on violence against children, including in schools and identified four main forms of violence in schools: bullying, sexual and gender-based violence, physical and psychological violence, and violence that includes a dimension external to schools, including violence associated with gang culture, weapons and fighting.

### **Bullying**

The *World Report on Violence against Children* considers bullying to be a pattern of behaviour rather than an isolated event. The most common form of bullying is verbal, which, if left unchecked, can lead also to physical violence. The Report underlines that almost all bullying is sexual or gender-based in nature, aimed at putting pressure on children to conform to cultural values and social attitudes, especially those that define perceived masculine or feminine roles.

Bullying can have serious repercussions for the victim and the perpetrator alike:

*For both the bully and the student who is bullied, the cycle of violence and intimidation results in greater interpersonal difficulties and poor performance in school. Students who are bullied are more likely than their peers to be depressed, lonely, or anxious and have low self-esteem. Bullies often act aggressively out of frustration, humiliation, anger and in response to social ridicule.*<sup>23</sup>

Recent studies suggest that around half of all children involved in bullying are both victims and perpetrators, and that they are the most troubled of all children involved in this manifestation of violence.<sup>24</sup> Among perpetrators, boys are more likely to engage in physical bullying, while girls most often engage in verbal forms of harassment of their peers.

As is the case with many forms of violence against children, data on bullying are scarce. Research conducted between 2003 and 2005 in a number of developing countries for the Global School-based Health Survey (GSHS) found a wide variation in national experiences: in China (Beijing), 17 per cent of girls and 23 per cent of boys (ages 13-15) reported having been bullied in the previous 30 days and in Zambia these figures rose to 67 per cent for girls and 63 per cent for boys.<sup>25</sup> In most

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<sup>22</sup> In 2001, on the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the General Assembly in its resolution 56/138 requested the Secretary-General to conduct an in-depth study on the question of violence against children and to put forward recommendations for consideration by Member States for appropriate action. The resulting “Report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children” A/61/299, prepared by Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, provides an understanding of the nature, extent, causes and consequences of different forms of violence against children. The Report looks at the principal settings in which violence takes place, one of which being schools (the others are the family, care and residential institutions, detention facilities and prisons, in work situations and in communities and on the streets).

<sup>23</sup> UNESCO, *Stopping Violence in Schools: A Guide for Teachers*, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> *World Report on Violence against Children*, *ibid*, note 4, p. 122.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 125.



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of the countries where data were available, between one quarter and one half of students indicated that they had been bullied in the last 30 days. Information from European countries, while not strictly comparable, suggests a similarly wide variation from country to country: at the lowest end of the scale, 15 per cent of girls and boys in Sweden aged 11, 13 and 15 reported having been bullied “within the past couple of months”, while the figure rises to 44 per cent of girls and 56 per cent of boys in Portugal, and 64 per cent of girls and 65 per cent of boys in Lithuania.<sup>26</sup> During the 2007-2008 school year in the USA, 32 per cent of students between the ages of 12 and 18 reported being bullied. Of these students, 21 per cent said they were bullied once or twice a month; 10 per cent reported being bullied once or twice a week; and 7 per cent indicated that they were bullied daily. Nearly 9 per cent reported being physically injured as a result of bullying.<sup>27</sup>

A recent study carried out in France by the International Observatory on Violence in Schools on behalf of UNICEF France and based on a national survey of 12,326 children in the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of primary school (between the ages of 9 and 11) found that 90 per cent of pupils indicated that they felt good or very good at school, and the same proportion confirmed that they had good or very good relations with their teachers. There was, however, a significant minority of children who viewed school as a place of violence. The majority of these students suffered at the hands of their peers rather than staff. Around 32 per cent of children indicated that they were “sometimes” victims of verbal bullying, and 35.1 per cent stated that they were “sometimes” victims of physical violence at school, while 6 per cent indicated that they were “very often” victims of violence at the hands of their peers.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the study found that a child who is victim of any kind of bullying is also much more often a victim of violence associated with theft or violence of a sexual nature.<sup>29</sup> The study also draws attention to the higher propensity for risk-taking among children who are victims of severe bullying.<sup>30</sup>

**Cyber-bullying** - that is bullying by means of emails, online chat lines, personal web pages, text messages and transmission of images – is increasingly becoming a source of concern. For children around the world, innovative technologies offer opportunities to create new spaces of interaction and to develop new forms of socialization. At the same time, these technologies make children potentially vulnerable to harassment and bullying in guises and ways that are often difficult for adults – parents, caregivers, teachers and others – to detect and respond to, particularly since it is a phenomenon that tends to take place in spaces that do not come under adult supervision. Cyber-bullying may have its origins in face-to-face social interaction in the learning environment; however children do not escape its influence at the end of the school day.

Research is beginning to offer a greater understanding of the extent and nature of cyber-bullying. A study from the USA indicates that 4 per cent of students between the ages of 12 and 18 reported having been victims of cyber-bullying during the 2007-2008 school year. Another study found that approximately 13 per cent of students in

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 124.

<sup>27</sup> Suicide Prevention Resource Centre, *Suicide and Bullying*, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Debarbieux, Eric, *A l'Ecole des Enfants Heureux... Enfin Presque*, p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, pp. 28-29.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

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grades 6 to 10 (between the ages of 11 and 16) reported being cyber-bullied.<sup>31</sup> The European Union Kids Online initiative conducted a survey of 25,000 internet users between the ages of 9 and 16, together with one parent of each interviewee, across 25 European countries. This survey, conducted in 2010, investigated key online risks, including bullying. Of the survey group, it was found that 93 per cent go online at least weekly.<sup>32</sup> Six per cent of the sample indicated that they had been sent nasty or hurtful messages online and three per cent admitted to having sent such messages to others. Most children who had received bullying messages online called on social support; one quarter, however, indicated that they had not informed anyone. Six in ten had also used online strategies such as deleting hurtful messages or blocking the bully.<sup>33</sup>

### **Sexual and gender-based violence**

As noted by the World Report on Violence against Children, it is estimated that, around the world, some 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 years of age experienced forced intercourse or other forms of sexual violence during 2002 alone.<sup>34</sup> Specific data on children's exposure to sexual violence in and around the school setting are limited, since many victims are hesitant to report acts of sexual violence for fear of being shamed, stigmatized, or because they fear not being believed or will face retaliation from their aggressor or aggressors. Nevertheless, available figures suggest that sexual violence in schools is a reality for a significant proportion of students. According to data published in 2005, 6.2 per cent of students in Germany and 1.1 per cent in Belgium had been subjected to sexual abuse. In Canada, one in four girls surveyed said she had experienced sexual harassment at school.<sup>35</sup> In Pakistan, the Minister of State for Religious Affairs recorded more than 2,500 complaints of sexual abuse by clerics in religious schools in 2002 and 2003. None of these led to successful prosecutions.<sup>36</sup>

The *World Report on Violence against Children* indicates that gender-based violence stems from gender inequality, stereotypes and socially imposed roles. Boys and girls are subjected to violence in different manners, experience it differently and themselves engage in violence in different ways. Boys, for example, are generally more likely to be subjected to corporal punishment than girls, while girls may find themselves harassed, taunted or even punished if they are seen to be behaving in an "inappropriate" manner, that is, in a manner perceived to be inconsistent with their assigned role in society. Harmful cultural stereotypes that demean children because of their sex or their known or suspected sexuality create environments in which children can be abused with impunity, including by adults in positions of trust and authority.<sup>37</sup> Sexual violence toward girls may be motivated by the desire to intimidate, punish or humiliate them, or by sexual interest and bravado on the part of boys and men.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Suicide Prevention Resource Centre, *Suicide and Bullying*, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Livingstone, Sonia et al, *Risks and safety on the Internet. The perspective of European Children. Key findings*, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Summary of the Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children, A/61/299, p. 3. These figures refer to sexual violence in all settings.

<sup>35</sup> Cited in *Plan, Learn without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*, p. 25.

<sup>36</sup> *World Report on Violence against Children*, *ibid.*, note 4, p. 119.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

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Studies suggest that sexual harassment of schoolgirls may be particularly common and extreme in places where other forms of school violence are also prevalent.<sup>39</sup> In these contexts, teachers and other school staff may see it as a “normal” part of school life and fail to give it the attention it requires. In other cases, school staff themselves may be the perpetrators of violence: in sub-Saharan Africa it is not uncommon to find teachers promising higher grades or reduced school fees or supplies in exchange for sex with girls. Sometimes, teachers blackmail or force girls to have sex with them, for example by threatening them with bad grades or by not giving them the certificate. Furthermore, due to teachers’ low salaries, sexual favours are sometimes seen as a form of compensation.<sup>40</sup> Boys too fall victim of sexual harassment and abuse. This can cause particular shame as it is widely considered a taboo subject. In Uganda, for example, research found that 8 per cent of 16 and 17-year-old boys and girls had had sex with their teacher, and 12 per cent with ancillary staff,<sup>41</sup> while in Zambia, the Global Schools Health Survey from 2004 found that 30 per cent of boys and 31 per cent of girls aged 13 to 15 reported having been physically forced to have sexual intercourse at least once in the previous month.<sup>42</sup>

Evidence from several Central and West African countries show that male students are among the perpetrators of sexual violence in and around schools. They may take advantage of their situation of superiority to abuse younger and weaker children, girls in particular.<sup>43</sup>

Sexual violence undermines a child’s self-esteem, contributes to poor performance in school, encourages school drop-out and increases the likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behaviour at an early age. It also exposes a child to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Sexual violence is, for example, an important factor in the high prevalence rate of HIV among girls and young women in Sub-Saharan Africa. Sexual violence also puts girls at risk of unwanted pregnancy, with possible harmful implication for both their own health and that of the baby. In Swaziland, 17.4 per cent of 13 to 17 year-old girls have been taken out of school because of pregnancy, and 10.6 per cent because they have been forced to have sex. A fifth of these rapes took place at or on the way to school.<sup>44</sup>

### **Physical and psychological violence**

The Committee on the Rights of the Child defines ‘physical’ or ‘corporal’ punishment as any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light.<sup>45</sup> Psychological punishment, on the other hand, involves various forms of cruel and degrading punishment that are not physical in nature, including punishment that belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats,

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>40</sup> Antonowicz, *ibid*, note 13, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup> Blaya, Catherine and Eric Debarbieux, *Expel Violence! A systematic review of interventions to prevent corporal punishment, sexual violence and bullying in schools*, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> WHO, Zambia Global Schools Health Survey 2004, cited in , *World Report on Violence against Children*, *ibid*, note 4, p. 120.

<sup>43</sup> Antonowicz, *ibid*, note 13, p. 23.

<sup>44</sup> Ellery, *ibid*, note 15, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 8, *ibid*, note 14, §11.

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threatens, scares or ridicules the child.<sup>46</sup>

In general, boys experience more frequent and more severe physical punishment than girls. Applying punishments in different ways conveys messages about what is expected of children and adults of each sex.<sup>47</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that corporal punishment in schools is sometimes administered with greater severity or frequency to children from groups that are subject to stigma and discrimination in society as a whole. For example, the *World Report on Violence against Children* notes that in India, the 1998 Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) found that higher caste teachers were inclined to humiliate children from Dalit<sup>48</sup> and other lower castes by labelling them as dull and incapable of being educated.<sup>49</sup>

The *World Report on Violence against Children* noted a clear trend away from corporal punishment in schools in all regions, most notably in Europe.<sup>50</sup> This trend has continued to increase in the process of follow-up to the World Report, with a growing number of countries outlawing the use of violence, including physical punishment in school. While this is a welcome trend, it opens up the risk that teachers who do not receive training in strategies for positive discipline may resort to psychological punishment in the classroom. This is an area where further research needs to be carried out in this area before conclusions can be drawn.

Despite legislative developments, in many countries there is no legislation in place yet. In others, the effectiveness of legal prohibition is hampered by poor enforcement or by low levels of awareness of this legislation among school staff and pupils.

In terms of its impact, physical punishment can seriously compromise a child's learning ability. India's National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) reports that a study of emotional experiences in classrooms, based on a survey of 1100 children, revealed that those who were frequently scolded saw their learning abilities compromised. Poor classroom environments, the use of bad language and beating, all impacted negatively on a child's learning ability. The survey also indicated that many children are afraid of attending school because of the physical and psychological abuse to which they are subjected.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, §11. In its General Comment no. 1 from 2001, the Committee observes that, "education must be provided in a way that respects the inherent dignity of the child and enables the child to express his or her views freely in accordance with article 12(1) [of the Convention on the Rights of the Child] and to participate in school life. Education must also be provided in a way that respects the strict limits on discipline reflected in article 28(2) and promotes non-violence in schools", UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, CRC/GC/2001/1, "General Comment No 1 (2001). Article 29(1): The Aims of Education", §8. In rejecting any justification of violence and humiliation as forms of punishment for children, the Committee is not rejecting the positive concept of discipline. In its General Comment No. 8 the Committee underlines that, "[t]he healthy development of children depends on parents and other adults for necessary guidance and direction, in line with children's evolving capacities, to assist their growth towards responsible life in society", UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/GC/8, "General Comment No. 8. The Right of the Child to Protection from Corporal Punishment and Other Cruel or Degrading Forms of Punishment", §13.

<sup>47</sup> *World Report on Violence against Children*, *ibid*, note 4, p. 118.

<sup>48</sup> "Dalit" refers to the lowest of the four castes, that of the "untouchables".

<sup>49</sup> *World Report on Violence against Children*, *ibid*, note 4, p. 118.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 117.

<sup>51</sup> National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, *Upholding Rights of Children. NCPCR 2007-2011*, p. 10.

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Physical punishment can also have serious repercussions for a student's mental and physical health. It has been linked to slow development of social skills, depression, anxiety, aggressive behaviour and a lack of empathy or caring for others.<sup>52</sup> It also contributes to the perpetuation of violence in schools. The UNESCO handbook on *Stopping Violence in Schools* indicates that physical punishment,

*neglects to teach students how to think critically, make sound moral judgements, cultivate inner control, and respond to life's circumstances and frustrations in a non-violent way. Such punishment shows students that the use of force – be it verbal, physical or emotional – is acceptable, especially when it is directed at younger, weaker individuals. This lesson leads to increased incidents of bullying and an overall culture of violence in schools.*<sup>53</sup>

### **Fighting, physical assault and gang violence**

Fighting, physical assault and gang violence can emerge within schools, or may represent the incursion of external violence into the school environment. In practice, the category of external violence is a broad one and the distinction between school violence and external violence is often hard to draw.

Fighting generally involves two or more people where it is not easy to make distinctions between perpetrators and victims.<sup>54</sup> Analysis of data from recent surveys conducted as part of the GSHS suggests that fighting is more common in developing countries and that girls from developing countries are more likely to participate in it than girls in developed and transitional countries.<sup>55</sup> The *World Report on Violence Against Children* indicates that physical assault, “can occur as a separate phenomenon, as in the case of an attack by one person on another driven by inflamed feelings of anger or jealousy. It may also be driven by general feelings of rage, frustration or humiliation unprovoked by anything the victim may have done, as in the case of violent sexual assault and random shootings.”<sup>56</sup> Boys in particular tend to engage in physical fighting and assault against each other as they seek to live up to male gender stereotypes.<sup>57</sup>

The impact of fighting and physical assaults and the fear and insecurity they generate, both among victims and those who witness such attacks, is exacerbated by the availability and use of weapons introduced into the school environment from outside. Weapons are also often associated with gang violence, which frequently seeps into schools from surrounding communities. The *World Report on Violence against Children* suggests that gangs are distinguished from other peer groups by more formal structures and rituals.<sup>58</sup> Gang violence in schools appears to be most prevalent in

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<sup>52</sup> UNESCO, *ibid*, note 23, p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> *World Report on Violence against Children*, *ibid*, note 4, p. 123 & 126.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 126.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 126.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 126.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 128.

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places where violence in the whole of society is common and where arms availability, gangs and drugs are part of the local culture. The issue received particular attention during the Caribbean and Latin American Regional consultations for the *World Report on Violence against Children*.<sup>59</sup>

### **Mandatory Chores**

*If he (the boy) has money he bribes (the teacher). If not, he has to work on the teacher's farm or fail for the year.*

Young boy, Liberia<sup>60</sup>

In countries where teacher's salaries are low, communities and schools, or school staff sometimes have an agreement on the use of children's labour as a form of remuneration for teachers.<sup>61</sup> Evidence from five West African countries reveals that girls may be requested to fetch water or undertake house chores such as cleaning laundry while boys may be requested to work in teachers' fields during the harvest season, or help transporting construction materials. These chores reduce the time children can dedicate to learning, be it during school hours or free time. They can be beyond children's strength and capacity and most importantly they can put children in vulnerable situations and at risk of sexual and other violence on their way to school or within school staff houses or compounds.<sup>62</sup>

### **Violence against the most vulnerable children**

*I feel really scared so during the day I do not go to the toilet. If I do go I will ask a friend to stand watch so nothing happens. Usually the toilets are full of gangsters smoking dagga and if you are alone they will try to rape you.*

15 year old female student, Western Cape, South Africa<sup>63</sup>

Girls are particularly at risk of violence and of being absent from classrooms around the world. There are several reasons for girls' low registration and high drop-out figures, including: economic factors; cultural factors such as a cultural preference for boys; or an expectation that girls should remain at home or work to support the family. However, violence in or around school, or the threat of violence, also represents a major obstacle to girls' schooling.

Some of the most serious violence-related barriers to girls' education include: sexual abuse – or the threat of such abuse – on the part of teachers, other school staff or male pupils; school drop-out for getting married or becoming pregnant (and, in certain countries, as a result of attitudes or even regulations that prevent girls returning to school after giving birth); the distance that girls must travel to school and the dangers associated with this daily trip; hostile learning environments, including gender-biased teaching materials, favouritism shown to boys and the allocation of menial tasks to

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 128.

<sup>60</sup> Antonowicz, *ibid*, note 13, p. 31

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p. 31

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. 31

<sup>63</sup> Wilson, Felicia, *Gender Based Violence in South African Schools*, p. 9.

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girls; the unsafe physical environment of schools, including the failure to provide separate and adequate toilet facilities; and the decision of parents to keep their daughters out of school because of the risks associated with the school environment.<sup>64</sup>

The vulnerability of girls can be exacerbated – particularly in developing countries – by patterns of economic inequality and, in some cases, significant political unrest or violent conflict.<sup>65</sup> Poverty is a particularly significant factor in cases where girls engage in transactional sex with teachers, school staff or other adults to financially support their education or family. In West and Central Africa, for example, the most reported practice of sexual exploitation is the denominated “sex for grades,” usually involving a male staff member and a female student.<sup>66</sup>

All too often, girls subjected to sexual abuse – or their parents or families – prefer not to denounce the perpetrator or perpetrators. In a UNICEF study on gender-based violence in and around schools in Swaziland and Zimbabwe, it was noted that,

*[p]eople do not want to speak out against neighbours or relatives, parents do not want to ‘make waves’ in the school if their daughter is being abused, and teachers themselves [...] do not want to speak up even though they know that abuse is taking place in the school or community.*<sup>67</sup>

In the case of teachers who engage in sexual abuse, their status often affords them a degree of immunity from the repercussions of their acts or they may exploit uneven power relations to protect themselves:

*After the war when I was 14 years old, my mother decided to send me back to school in Kolashan town. I had to drop out one year later. The 45-year-old teacher approached me and I became pregnant. I have a baby now, but apart from my mother no one helps me take care of it. The teacher denies what happened and refuses to pay for the child.*

17-year-old girl, Liberia<sup>68</sup>

In addition to girls, other groups of children are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and other human rights abuses in and around the school setting. These include indigenous children, children with disabilities, children from ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious minorities, asylum seeking and refugee children, children affected by HIV/AIDS, children from lower castes in parts of South Asia, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) children and youth.

Often the discrimination and exclusion these children experience is multi-layered and affects many if not all aspects of their lives. In the case of education, children

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<sup>64</sup> Mitchell, Claudia and Iwani Mothobi-Tapela, *Taking Action: Gender-Based Violence in and around Schools in Swaziland and Zimbabwe*, p. 20.

<sup>65</sup> Wilson, Felicia, *ibid*, note 63, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> Antonowicz, *ibid*, note 13, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Mitchell, *ibid*, note 64, p. 36.

<sup>68</sup> Antonowicz, *ibid*, note 13, p. 22.

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belonging to vulnerable groups not only face obstacles to gaining access to schooling, but also struggle to remain in school. The sad outcome is that children who often have the greatest need for support, acceptance and dignified treatment are those who are most easily and frequently targeted for violence in the school setting by their peers, and by school staff. They may also struggle to have their situation taken seriously should they seek to report violence to school authorities or others and, in some cases they may simply choose not to report violence – even serious violence, including sexual abuse – for fear of drawing attention to an already stigmatized and marginalized family or community.

In the case of children belonging to ethnic, linguistic or cultural minorities, teachers from the majority culture may display negative attitudes towards them, expect very little from them, and fail to recognize and encourage their individual talents.<sup>69</sup> This is a dimension of what Bush and Saltarelli have called “the negative face of education”, which manifests itself in “the uneven distribution of education to create or preserve privilege, the use of education as a weapon of cultural repression, and the production or doctoring of textbooks to promote intolerance.”<sup>70</sup> This phenomenon is not exclusive to the area of teaching. It can also manifest itself in “hidden curricula”, that is, the values transmitted in non-academic contexts such as during games and recreation, in the lunch queue and on the way to or from school. For example, the above-mentioned study conducted in France on behalf of UNICEF found that, of a sample population of 12,326 pupils between the ages of 9 and 11 in 157 schools, 4.6 per cent considered that they had been subjected to racism on the part of an adult in their school, most often from ancillary workers in the school canteen.<sup>71</sup>

Refugee children may be subjected to similar treatment: there are, for example, reports that children displaced from Anglophone Sierra Leone to francophone Guinea Conakry were physically punished in their new schools for not being able to understand French.<sup>72</sup> A refugee girl and fourth grade pupil in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire explains that,

*[t]he pupils here treat us as DG (déplacés de guerre); as attackers and they often yell at us in the corridor, ‘attackers, go back home!’ Those of us who can’t take these insults don’t come to school.<sup>73</sup>*

In the case of indigenous children, these girls and boys belong to communities that often face extreme discrimination and high levels of violence, especially when living in/and or using resources that are considered to be of significant commercial value. Furthermore, the traditional social structures that would normally provide protection from violence for indigenous children are often torn apart when indigenous peoples are exploited, forced off their land or driven to move to urban areas. In most countries

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<sup>69</sup> Bush, Kenneth D and Diana Saltarelli (eds), *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict. Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*, p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p. v.

<sup>71</sup> Observatoire International de la Violence à l’Ecole, *A l’Ecole des enfants heureux... enfin presque. Synthèse des résultats*, p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Antonowicz, *ibid*, note 13, p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p. 32.



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with indigenous populations, indigenous children have low school enrolment rates and, if they do attend school, are less likely than their non-indigenous peers to have the support to perform well. Where schools replicate the prejudice and violence that characterizes the communities in which they are located, those indigenous children who do attend school risk being subjected to violence by their peers or, indeed, by teaching staff.<sup>74</sup>

Studies indicate that LGBT youth experience more bullying - including physical violence and injury - at school than their heterosexual peers. The *World Report on Violence against Children* notes that, “violence [in educational settings] is increasingly directed against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered young people in many States and regions.”<sup>75</sup> In many countries, homosexual activity is a criminal offence or, at least, highly stigmatized, with the result that bullying and other forms of violence towards youth who are homosexual, or perceived to be homosexual, receives little official attention.<sup>76</sup> A 2005 survey of students between the ages of 13 and 18 in the United States found that 65 per cent reported being verbally or physically assaulted over the past year because of “their perceived or actual appearance, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability, or religion.” Already high, this figure rose to 90 per cent for LGBT teenagers. A research review in the United States also found that the relationship between bullying and suicide risk was significantly stronger for lesbian, gay and transsexual youth than for heterosexual youth.<sup>77</sup>

In the case of children with disabilities, precise global data on exclusion for education do not exist. However there is a general consensus that at least one third of the world’s 72 million children who are not in school have a disability of one form or another, while estimates from the World Bank and others suggest that at most 5 per cent of children with disabilities reach the Education for All goal of primary school completion.<sup>78</sup> Like other vulnerable children, many children with disabilities may never be registered for school, while others may be registered but fail to attend or subsequently drop out. Social stigma,<sup>79</sup> barriers to physical access, lack of information and material in appropriate forms, and lack of training for teaching staff all contribute to this phenomenon, however violence directed at children with disabilities also plays an important part. As noted by the Special Representative on Violence against Children,<sup>80</sup> the lives of children with disabilities are fraught with stigma, discrimination, cultural practices, misperceptions and invisibility; their capacity and positive potential are often ignored and their existence marked by violence, neglect, injury and exploitation. These risks are also present in schools. The *World Report on Violence against Children* observes that, “children with disabilities are at heightened risk of violence for a variety of reasons, ranging from deeply ingrained cultural prejudices to the higher emotional, physical, economic and social

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<sup>74</sup> For more on indigenous children, see UNICEF, *Ensuring the Rights of Indigenous Children*, 2004.

<sup>75</sup> *World Report on Violence against Children*, *ibid*, note 4, p. 15.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p. 122

<sup>77</sup> Suicide Prevention Resource Centre, *Suicide and Bullying*, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> International Disability Alliance, *The Right to Education: Enabling Society to Include and Benefit from the Capacities of Persons with Disabilities*, p. 1.

<sup>79</sup> Studies from Nigeria and Burkina Faso, for example, indicate that children with epilepsy are highly stigmatised in school because their illness evokes fear of supernatural forces among fellow pupils and even teachers. Antonowicz, *ibid*, note 13, p. 32.

<sup>80</sup> A/66/227, p. 10

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demands that a child's disability can place on his or her family."<sup>81</sup> The Global Survey on HIV/AIDS and Disability notes that persons with disabilities have a significantly elevated risk of experiencing physical violence, sexual abuse and rape. At the same time, however, they have little or no access to protection and redress through police and legal systems and enjoy less access to medical care and counselling than their non-disabled peers.<sup>82</sup>

Impairments often make children with disabilities appear to be "easy victims", not only because they may have difficulty defending themselves or in reporting the abuse, but also because their accounts are often dismissed.<sup>83</sup> It is also the case that violence against a child with a disability may be considered as somehow less serious and the child's testimony may be regarded as less reliable than that of a child without a disability.<sup>84</sup> Children with disabilities may also be more likely to put up with violence and abuse from their peers in order to gain access to social groups.

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<sup>81</sup> *World Report on Violence against Children*, *ibid*, note 4, p. 68.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in Plan, *Learn without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*, p. 26.

<sup>83</sup> UNICEF, *Promoting the Rights of Children with Disabilities*, p. 19.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

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### 3. WORKING FOR CHANGE

The *World Report on Violence against Children* concludes that the most effective approaches to countering violence are tailored to the specific situation and circumstances of particular schools. Schools are an inherent part of the communities in which they are located, and initiatives to end violence in schools must take this co-dependency into account. At the same time, the Report also recognizes that these successful initiatives have key elements in common: “[s]pecifically, they are based on the recognition that all children have equal rights to education in settings that are free from violence, and that one of the functions of education is to produce adults imbued with non-violent values and practices”.<sup>85</sup>

The approach of tailored solutions founded upon common human rights principles is exemplified by UNICEF’s Child Friendly Schools initiative. The initiative addresses a wide range of issues influencing the quality of a child’s education.

#### *UNICEF Child Friendly Schools*

From the perspective of UNICEF’s Child Friendly Schools initiative, violence is one issue among several, including: school design and layout; the provision of water and sanitation; teaching strategies in the classroom; curriculum development; inclusiveness and gender sensitivity; school management and budgeting; links with the local community; and the actions of education authorities and governments.

This approach unambiguously links the school to the wider community, recognizing, for example, that the protection and safety of children in their homes has a direct impact on children’s capacity to attend class and to learn.

The interconnected nature of these different elements is well illustrated in the case of school design. Good school design, as advocated by the Child Friendly Schools initiative and detailed in the manual produced for the project, not only addresses issues of classroom size, ventilation, lighting, access and so on, it also connects these aspects to child protection by advocating for the design of classrooms and other spaces in such a way that teacher-pupil interaction is readily visible from the outside, the provision of separate and adequate toilet facilities for boys and girls (including facilities for children with disabilities), the minimisation of secluded areas where children might be at risk of abuse, and the erection of fencing around schools in order to create a safe, child-friendly space protected from harmful outside influences.

The physical appearance of schools is also important: when the school environment is perceived as unwelcoming or threatening, attendance suffers. In contrast, clean and well-maintained buildings and colourful classrooms both contribute to and reflect a sense of pride in the school on the part of staff and children alike. An evaluation of the Child Friendly Schools model commissioned by UNICEF in 2008 found that there were several Child Friendly Schools models around the world and that all successfully applied the key principles of inclusiveness, child-centredness and democratic participation in varying contexts and with varying emphasis.

Learners in Child Friendly Schools were found to feel safe, supported and engaged. They also believed that adults supported the inclusion and success of all students in schools where there were high levels of family and community participation and where child-centred pedagogical approaches were being implemented.

Importantly, Child Friendly Schools were found to be successful in creating positive environments for girls’ education. Recommendations emerging from the evaluation included identifying strong school leaders and equipping them with more skills and capacity to implement Child Friendly Schools projects.

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<sup>85</sup> *World Report on Violence against Children*, *ibid*, note 4, p. 138.

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As noted by the Special Representative on Violence against Children,<sup>86</sup> drawing on experience from a range of initiatives from around the world, it is possible to identify a number of key elements that can contribute to reducing and even ending violence in all school settings. These are:

- developing holistic, whole school strategies;
- partnering with children;
- providing support for teachers and other staff;
- changing attitudes and working with social norms;
- securing children’s legal protection; and
- consolidating data and research.
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The remainder of this section looks at each of these elements in greater detail.

### **Developing holistic, whole school strategies**

The most promising initiatives to end violence in schools succeed in breaking away from a strictly sectoral approach in favour of child-centred, “whole school” strategies. These strategies seek to overcome inherent bureaucratic and administrative divisions by addressing the issue of violence on a number of levels simultaneously, including through legislation, policy development, budgetary allocations, employment policy, teacher training, school administration and curricula development. School and system wide interventions not only reduce incidents of violence, but also contribute to reducing truancy, improving academic achievement, and enhancing children’s social skills and well-being.<sup>87</sup> The whole school approach is well illustrated by Plan International’s Learn without Fear campaign, a global effort to end violence against children in schools launched in 2008.

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<sup>86</sup> A/HRC/19/64, p. 11-13

<sup>87</sup> Plan, *ibid*, note 82, *s*, p. 46.

### *Plan's Learn without Fear Campaign*

With a particular focus on the 66 countries in which Plan operates, this campaign addresses a range of violence issues, including sexual abuse, neglect, verbal and emotional abuse, corporal punishment, bullying, peer-to-peer violence, youth gangs, harassment on the way to and from school, and the use of weapons in and around schools.

The campaign aims to raise the profile of these issues among the public and persuade governments, schools and other key players of the need to act, and is founded upon a seven point plan:

- working with governments to develop and enforce laws against school violence;
- working with partners to develop reporting and referral mechanisms for children affected by school violence and advocating for the establishment or expansion of confidential child hotlines;
- recognizing children and young people as critical participants in the development of strategies and solutions to address violence in schools;
- working with governments to establish holistic data collection systems and carry out research to ascertain the scale and severity of violence in their schools;
- ensuring that sufficient resources are earmarked by governments and international organizations to tackle violence in schools;
- advocating with UN agencies, multilateral donors, development banks and international NGOs to increase support to governments to tackle violence in schools;
- working with pupils, parents, school staff, education authorities and the community to expel violence from schools.

As of August 2010, the Learn without Fear Campaign was operating in 44 countries around the world. It has contributed to changes in legislation, the creation of safer schools and communities, and an increased awareness of the issue of violence in schools. In two years, anti-violence campaign messages have reached 94 million adults and children through radio and television shows, leaflets, training sessions and workshops.

Children are involved in all aspects of the campaign, ranging from campaign planning in Malawi and Egypt, to running radio shows three times a week in Senegal, and participating in regional art collaborations across Asia. Over the same period, the campaign trained more than 19,000 teachers in non-violent teaching methods. As a result, 33 of the 44 countries in which the campaign has been implemented report an increase in non-violent practices among educators.

Learn without Fear also addresses reporting of and responses to violence in schools. To date it has contributed to improvements in mechanisms that provide children with the opportunity to report violent incidents and hold perpetrators to account in 27 of the 44 participating countries. A further 36 campaign countries provided access to medical support for injuries related to school violence and 28 countries also provided counselling services for affected children.

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While Plan's Learn without Fear campaign operates on a country-wide level, other successful whole school approaches work on a school-by-school basis. This is the case for the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme, the first version of which was developed in Norway in the mid-1980s. The Olweus Programme aims to reduce existing bullying problems among students, prevent new episodes of bullying from arising and achieve better peer relations at school.

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The programme is a long-term, system-wide initiative involving programme components at four levels. At the school level, components include: establishing a bullying prevention coordinating committee; conducting committee and staff trainings; administering the Olweus bullying questionnaire; holding staff discussion group meetings; introducing school rules against bullying; reviewing and refining school supervisory systems; holding a school launch event for the programme; and involving parents.

At the individual level, the programme foresees: supervising students' activities; ensuring that all staff intervene on the spot when bullying occurs; holding meetings with students involved in bullying; holding meetings with parents of involved students; and developing individual intervention plans for these students. At the classroom level, the Olweus Programme calls for: posting and enforcing school-wide rules against bullying; holding regular class meetings; and holding regular meetings with parents.

Finally, at the community level, components of the Programme include: involving community members on bullying prevention coordinating committees; developing partnerships with community members to support school programmes; and helping to spread anti-bullying messages and principles of best practices in the community. Experience demonstrates that the greatest costs of this programme are during the initial start-up, although resources are needed for on-going training and other activities aimed at maintaining staff commitment.<sup>88</sup>

Since 2001, at the initiative of the Norwegian Government, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has been implemented on a large-scale basis in elementary and lower secondary schools throughout the country. In addition, the Programme has been successfully implemented in more than a dozen other countries, including Australia, the UK and the USA. After the programme had been implemented in three elementary schools in Chula Vista, California, USA, a survey of students, staff and parents indicated a 21 per cent decrease in reports of being bullied after 1 year and a 14 per cent decrease after 2 years; and 8 per cent decrease in reports of bullying others after 1 year, and a 17 per cent decrease after 2 years. Moreover, after 1 year, students were more likely to perceive that adults at school tried to prevent bullying, and parents felt that administrators were doing more to stop bullying.<sup>89</sup>

The lessons learned from anti-bullying programmes provide a crucial reference to address other forms of violence against children in schools.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ellery, *ibid*, note 15, p. 14.

<sup>89</sup> See "Success Stories", [http://www.olweus.org/public/case\\_studies.page](http://www.olweus.org/public/case_studies.page), accessed 14 July 2011 [could we check the website and update the date?].

<sup>90</sup> SRSB *ibid*, p. 12

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## Partnering with children

Effectively addressing violence in schools cannot be done without the meaningful involvement of children. Indeed, children have the capacity to act as important agents of change. The UNICEF Innocenti Insight on the role of education in ethnic conflict observes that,

*if the border between schooling and society is [...] permeable, this opens up the possibility that students may carry non-confrontational and tolerant attitudes from the classroom into the broader community. Just as teachers may be role models to the students they teach, so students may play an active role in shaping the attitudinal and perceptual environment beyond the walls of the school.*<sup>91</sup>

An example of this comes for the Save the Children Violence Free School project in Afghanistan. Thirteen-year old Omid recounts;

*One day I went with my classmate to the bazaar (market) to buy stationery. I saw a shopkeeper was beating and using bad language towards his son. My friend and I decided to talk to the shopkeeper. We politely greeted him and I asked him if he had any stationery, then I told him that we learned at school that adults should respect children and not beat or punish them. If children make a mistake, adults should help them to find a solution for their problem and should try to see things from the child's viewpoint. At first he got angry with me but slowly he started to understand that I was right. He apologized and promised not to beat his son again. Without the Violence Free School project I would never have done that.*<sup>92</sup>

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has underlined the importance of participation of children in school life, the creation of school communities and student councils, peer education and peer counselling, and the involvement of children in school disciplinary proceedings as part of the process of learning and experiencing the realization of rights.<sup>93</sup> Regarding discipline, children themselves recognize the importance of clear structures and call for unambiguous rules. They ask, however, that these rules respect their human rights at all times.

The enthusiasm and commitment of children mean that modest initiatives can gain important momentum. In 2009, in the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas School in northern El Salvador, a group of 12 children, parents, teachers and other school staff came together to develop a manual for their school based on the principle of peaceful co-existence. This manual sets out rules and standards of behaviour for students and

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<sup>91</sup> Bush, *ibid*, note 69, p. 4.

<sup>92</sup> Save the Children, "Omid – Afghanistan", Violence Free School project, case study, date of interview 1 December 2010.

<sup>93</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 1, *ibid*, note 2, §8. Experience suggests that peer mediation can be an important resource for resolving tension, but it is most effective in schools where there is already a culture of trust and respect.

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teachers alike. Subsequently a number of participatory student committees were set up to address issues such as conflict mediation, emergency responses and student government and to deliberate on appropriate disciplinary measures for students. The blueprint for this kind of student engagement was initiated by Plan International through the ‘Step by step manual towards school coexistence and student participation’. This manual sets out how students can actively participate in drafting their own rules for school and highlights ways of ensuring that these rules are respected. The Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas School was part of a pilot project undertaken by Plan and the Ministry of Education that is now being rolled out in all 5,000 schools in El Salvador.<sup>94</sup>

Save the Children’s Violence Free Schools project in Afghanistan, mentioned above, is another whole school initiative that gives a strong emphasis to the involvement of children, particularly through their meaningful participation in school structures, including students’ councils.

#### ***Save the Children’s Violence Free Schools***

The school system in Afghanistan, a country characterized by high levels of violence, conflict and gender inequality, faces serious challenges, including low literacy rates, and low school enrolment and retention rates. Dropout rates are particularly high among girls. Since 2008 corporal punishment in schools has been prohibited under the Education Act, however Save the Children reports that beating and humiliation is a daily reality for many children. In this challenging setting, Save the Children launched the Violence Free School project in 2008 in ten schools (five girls’ and five boys’ schools) in Jalalabad in Nangarhar Province, and in 20 inner-city schools in Mazar-i-Sharif in the north of Afghanistan.

The project focuses on the development and implementation of school-based child protection systems to addresses physical and humiliating punishment and to prevent sexual abuse and gender discrimination in schools. It provides technical support and capacity building for school administrations and teachers. It also develops a protection policy for each school and creates procedures to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse. One of the key elements of the project is the establishment of three different committees in each school: a child protection committee to directly address specific issues arising in the school; a parent, teacher and student association to facilitate dialogue among these groups and with the community in which the school is located; and a student council to promote communication among pupils, help them organize themselves and address issues affecting them.

Save the Children staff is attached to each school, conduct regular classroom observations and work with the committees and the school administration. They partner with teachers, headmaster and students to address challenges and structural issues as they emerge. Children appear to show a clear appreciation of the changes the Violence Free School project is bringing about:

*Since I joined the Student Council, I learned a lot of things and I am very happy and feel proud. [...] I am one of the members of this council, where all members with the Violence Free School facilitator discuss issues and find solutions. This council has managed to respond positively to many issues so far, and this is one of the reasons why students can enjoy their school environment and study just with the purpose of learning and not from the fear of teachers.*

Basira, 15 year old girls, Balkh Province

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<sup>94</sup> “Students work together for a bullying-free school”, <http://plan-international.org/learnwithoutfear/resources/stories/salvador-peace-school>, accessed 15 July 2011.



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The readiness of children to respond to, and indeed, act upon the idea that schools must be free from violence, including violence carried out by children themselves such as bullying, sexual harassment and fighting, is enhanced by cultivating positive, peaceful and tolerant attitudes and behaviour in early childhood. Early childhood initiatives can improve developmental readiness among children, ensure timely entry into school and encourage better learning outcomes. It can also prevent patterns of bullying that appear at a young age. Early initiatives are, moreover, likely to enhance the resilience of children. Resilience refers to a child's ability to cope successfully with everyday challenges, stress and adversity, and derives from their being able to build positive relations with others. Increased resilience reduces the likelihood of a child reacting with violence or falling victim to it. This is an area where further work is required to understand the factors contributing to the resilience of children, that is, the characteristics that make children more or less likely to be victimized and more or less capable of coping with this victimization.

Children also have the capacity to protect each other, and identify and support victims of violence among their peers. To do this most effectively, they must be informed in a child-friendly manner of the procedures in place for reporting violence and the likely process thereafter. This implies that safe, easily-accessible, child-sensitive, confidential and independent counselling and reporting mechanisms to address incidents of violence must be in place. As noted by the Special Representative on Violence against Children in a report to the Human Rights Council,<sup>95</sup> these mechanisms are frequently unavailable and, when they exist, they tend to lack the necessary resources and skills to address children's concerns and promote children's healing and reintegration. Telephone helplines for children represent an important resource in this respect, as they can be called anonymously and provide advice and support. As noted by the Special Representative, for these mechanisms to be effective, they need to be a core component of a robust and integrated national child protection system, acting as a resource for children and also as a referral system for those in need of advice and assistance. Under its Action Plan for 2011, the Lebanese Higher Council for Childhood is introducing a child helpline with technical support from Italy's Telefono Azzurro service. Plan Kenya and Childline Kenya have also worked together to set up a free 24-hour telephone helpline for children. Launched in March 2008, the service, delivered by the Government of Kenya in partnership with Childline, provides both preventive and support services through referral and school outreach facilities.

The Department of Children's Services provides personnel to manage rescue operations, court procedures and the preparation of children's cases. The three-digit number associated with the service is memorable and free on all telephone technology.<sup>96</sup>

The principle of partnering with children requires that this partnership be built with all children, without exception. This means that specific steps must be taken to ensure the inclusion of the most vulnerable children in all initiatives to prevent and eliminate violence in schools. In situations where gender-based violence presents a specific

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<sup>95</sup> A/HRC/16/56 Joint Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Special Representative of the Secretary-general on Violence against Children, p. 3

<sup>96</sup> Laurie, *ibid*, note 91, p. 5.

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obstacle to children's full participation in school life, life-skills curricula can be developed that include modules to build both boys' and girls' awareness of the power dynamics of gender inequality, and sex education classes can be introduced to provide alternative models to abusive relations that children may see modelled in their own homes or communities.<sup>97</sup> In the case of children with disabilities, including a disability perspective in all initiatives to eliminate violence in schools will go a long way to helping to ensure that these children are able to enjoy their right to education. This may involve giving extra training and support to teachers, mobilizing parents and school governors, galvanizing student bodies such as school councils, facilitating leadership opportunities for children with disabilities and, of course, working with children themselves to promote respect for children with disabilities.

The attitude of children to their disabled peers can and does change. The UNICEF Innocenti Insight on children and disability in CEE/CIS and the Baltic States quotes Teddy and Milena, two 16-year-olds living in an institution in Bulgaria. Speaking about their relations with other children, they observe that it is a case of getting to know each other:

*[f]or example, in our school, we study with children from town. In the beginning, they thought, 'who are they, they are invalids' but when they got to know us, they adopted very different attitude towards us and now they even count on our support.*<sup>98</sup>

The same principles apply to all vulnerable children. The first step is to ensure access to schools and other learning settings. The next is to ensure the quality of their learning experience once in school. Among its comprehensive provisions, and with the explicit intention of creating a child-friendly whole school environment, the 2009 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in India includes a provision whereby 25 per cent of entry-level places in private schools are reserved for disadvantaged children from the local neighbourhood (similar quotas for government aided schools were already in place). The same Act also stipulates barrier-free education for children with special needs, and requires all schools to constitute a School Management Committee, comprising local authority officials, teachers, parents and guardians. The Act mandates that 50 per cent of the membership of these committees should be from among women and parents of children from disadvantaged groups.<sup>99</sup>

Schools that teach tolerance, value diversity and thus welcome children who would otherwise face discrimination are likely to be safer and more rewarding places for *all* children to learn and develop. In the case of children affected by HIV or AIDS, for example, schools that are organized and managed according to child-friendly principles – that is, the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child – can provide day-to-day support and protection, while offering a sense of normality and belonging, and the opportunity to play and form friendships. Schools can also set an example to the community by promoting understanding, solidarity and

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<sup>97</sup> Plan, *ibid*, note 82, p. 30.

<sup>98</sup> UNICEF, *Children and Disability in Transition in CEE/CIS and Baltic States*, p. 60.

<sup>99</sup> Government of India, "The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act", 2009.

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positive attitudes toward children – and teachers – infected with or affected by HIV or AIDS.<sup>100</sup>

### **Providing support for teachers and other staff**

In many respects, it is the attitude, approach and skills of teachers and other staff that most directly shape a child's experience in school. Ideally, when discipline is required it should aim at positive reinforcement, constructive criticism and clear guidance and instruction.<sup>101</sup> These teaching skills need to be communicated and learned through adequate training on alternative discipline. Teachers, who demonstrate pro-social, constructive behaviour, provide guidance and offer protection, increase their students' resilience by showing a positive, alternative way of responding to life's challenges.<sup>102</sup> It has also been observed that teachers who have received training in positive discipline are generally more favourable toward the abolition of corporal punishment than teachers who have not received such training.<sup>103</sup>

In Yemen, a regional initiative provided training of trainers on peace building and alternatives to corporal punishment in school to 23 national staff from the Ministry of Education. These national trainers then developed a training manual on alternatives to corporal punishment and trained some 340 teachers in Aden, Lahaj, Sana'a and Taiz on how to use this manual. As of 2010, the manual is included in the training package prepared by the Yemeni Ministry of Education. Furthermore, UNICEF and Save the Children printed 5000 copies of this manual and distributed them to basic education schools in the targeted governorates.<sup>104</sup>

Resources for inclusive classroom methods are also available from the Council of Europe, UNESCO and Save the Children, among others. One such resource, produced by Save the Children Sweden, South East Asia and Pacific, is entitled *Positive Discipline: What it is and how to do it*.<sup>105</sup> The publication identifies seven key characteristics of positive discipline: it is non-violent and respectful of the child as a learner; it identifies long-term solutions that develop children's own self-discipline; it involves clear communication of parents' expectations, rules and limits; it builds a mutually respectful relationship between parents and children; it teaches children life-long skills; it increases children's competence and confidence to handle challenging situations; and it teaches courtesy, non-violence, empathy, human rights, self-respect and respect for others.

The Council of Europe violence reduction in schools teacher training from 2008 has a focus on making the school environment a safe space for learners where everyone can live and work, learn and play without fear. After the modules the participants will be in a better position to contribute to the prevention of violence; in particular they will be better equipped to: raise awareness in learners, in their families and communities;

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<sup>100</sup> UNICEF, *Caring for Children Affected by HIV and AIDS*, p. 15.

<sup>101</sup> *World Report on Violence against Children*, *ibid*, note 4, p. 148.

<sup>102</sup> UNESCO, *ibid*, note 23, p. 19.

<sup>103</sup> Plan, *ibid*, note 82, p. 47.

<sup>104</sup> UNICEF and Save the Children, *Violence against Children in Schools: A Regional Analysis of Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen*, p. 23.

<sup>105</sup> Durrant, Joan, *Positive Discipline: What it is and how to do it*, Save the Children Sweden South East Asia and the Pacific, p. 6.

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act on the underlying causes of violent behaviour; establish and maintain a learning environment where violence is not an option; respond to violence when it occurs; and contribute to making schools a safe place of learning and living.<sup>106</sup>

In some cases, teachers must also cope with working in a highly stressful environment. The ILO has indicated that,

*[t]eachers, the largest job category in the education sector, bear the brunt of violence and stress affecting employees. [...] The intensive interactions between school heads, teachers and students over learning methods and outcomes, and pupil indiscipline that is often due to external factors, create tensions that are sources of violence, particularly at secondary levels.*<sup>107</sup>

In order to reduce stress levels for teachers, the ILO advocates the involvement of a range of actors at various levels, including school and higher-level management, teachers' union representatives, and medical and insurance staff in addition to affected individuals. At the individual level, solutions "emphasize training to recognize potential problems and symptoms, counselling and support for victims and sufferers, and transfers to other less stressful or violent environments". Initiatives to promote "school or organizational healthiness" include working to ensure, "the soundness of organizational coherence and its integration of objectives, tasks, problem-solving skills and development efforts", while organizational interventions to help manage stress in education include, "redesigning work, ergonomics, teacher training and counselling to assist teachers in coping, and organization of school teams to help restore organizational healthiness".<sup>108</sup>

Teachers may also need support to understand and influence gender relations. Workshops and appropriate training materials can help them explore the gendered dimensions of teaching and learning and empower them to play a key role in reducing gender-based violence— not only in schools, but also in the community in general. A safer environment can also be achieved through employing a higher number of female teachers and school-based social workers,<sup>109</sup> and ensuring they receive adequate training in preventing and responding to gender-based violence.<sup>110</sup> To address concerns about gendered violence against girls in schools in Guinea and Sierra Leone, the International Rescue Committee recruited and trained female classroom assistants to work alongside male teachers in some refugee school classrooms, where most teachers are men. An evaluation of the pilot project found that the presence of the classroom assistance led to significant decreases in pregnancies and dropouts and increases in girls' attendance and academic achievement. In addition, both girls and boys reported that they felt more comfortable in the classroom. Where necessary, classrooms assistants reached out beyond schools and followed-up with students in

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<sup>106</sup> See

[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/pestalozzi/Activities/Modules/Violence/Violence\\_intro\\_EN.asp#ToPOfPage](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/pestalozzi/Activities/Modules/Violence/Violence_intro_EN.asp#ToPOfPage)

<sup>107</sup> ILO, "Violence and stress in education workplaces", p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>109</sup> Plan, *ibid*, note 82, p. 46.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, pp. 29-30.

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their homes.<sup>111</sup> Teachers may, in addition, require training to recognize and act upon the early signs of violence or abuse in children, and the procedures to follow in the event that they are concerned about the well-being of a child. In France, since 2010, all new teachers receive training on violence management. There are, in addition, a number of resources available to teachers in this area, including DVDs and internet sites designed to reinforce training. There is also a kit available for training parents in violence management.

In the absence of training in gender relations and child-friendly approaches in the classroom, there is a risk that teachers and other school staff may resort to violent methods simply because they have not been provided with the skills and knowledge to impose alternative models of discipline or maintain academic standards. As noted by Plan, “[u]nless teachers themselves have been educated about gender and power issues, they are likely to model behaviour that reflects their own experiences, and those of the wider community, which are often deeply unequal and violent.”<sup>112</sup>

The learning atmosphere created by teachers’ lack of awareness of alternative forms of discipline and, in certain cases, their exploitation of pupils, especially girls, is often exacerbated by low salaries, growing class sizes and the sense among teachers that they are undervalued in their communities or in wider society. Recognizing this, Save the Children Sweden together with Friends in Village Development Bangladesh have prepared a booklet called *Stories of Remarkable Teachers* in which children, through focus group discussions, speak of some of the most influential teachers they have met and the teaching approaches they used. These include: “instead of giving punishment, cordially making students understand the lesson if they failed to prepare”; “friendly behaviour”; “speaking nicely”; “speaking with a smile”; “equal care to all students”; “punctuality”; and “singing songs and other extracurricular activities”.<sup>113</sup>

Pupils from a school in Manikganj wrote, “Our favourite teacher [...] does not believe in using corporal punishments. Instead she advises students to be good and sincere. She encourages respecting elders and loving younger ones. She always gives honour to her colleagues.”<sup>114</sup> Pupils from Sylhet explained that,

*Our favourite teacher [...] always takes care of us. [...] She always gives special attention and care for the sick and weak students [...]. She is sensitive to the disabled students. Anwar, a weak student who felt discomfort and fear and liked to stay alone in the class, gradually recovered himself with her extra care and attention.*<sup>115</sup>

Teachers like these serve as models for non-violent interaction for children, even in situations where children risk falling victim to violence in their homes and communities.

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<sup>111</sup> The International Rescue Committee, *Classroom Assistant Professional Development Training Manual*, 2003, cited in UNICEF, *ibid*, note 86, chapter 5, p. 24.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26.

<sup>113</sup> Basher, Sarwar and Ziaur Rahman Shipar, *Stories of Remarkable Teachers*, p. 15.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

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As the *World Report on Violence against Children* underlines, “teachers cannot carry the whole burden”.<sup>116</sup> Teachers require support in creating inclusive classrooms in which all children can enjoy their right to education in a safe environment. Non-violent values must be promoted daily throughout the whole school structure and made an integral part of school management. This may mean working with education authorities, inviting the involvement of teachers’ unions, engaging with school heads, mobilizing school governors and galvanizing student bodies such as school councils.

There should also be a clear code of conduct for all school staff, and appropriate sanctions should be brought against any member of staff who breaches this code. Sanctions should extend to any staff member who willingly fails to report incidents of violence, including bullying, harassment, abuse or corporal punishment.

Teachers’ unions have an important role in informing and supporting their members. For example, Education International (EI), the global union organization representing teachers’ organizations, adopted a **Declaration on Professional Ethics** at its Third World Congress in 2001. This Declaration, further updated in 2004, has the objectives of: raising consciousness about the norms and ethics of the teaching profession, helping to increase job satisfaction in education and enhance status and self-esteem of teaching staff, and increasing respect for the profession in communities.<sup>117</sup> Article 2 of the Declaration indicates that education personnel shall:

- a) Respect the rights of all children to benefit from the provisions identified in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child particularly as those rights apply to education;
- b) Acknowledge the uniqueness, individuality and specific needs of each student and provide guidance and encouragement to each student to realize his/her full potential;
- c) Give students a feeling of being part of a community of mutual commitment with room for everyone;
- d) Maintain professional relations with students;
- e) Safeguard and promote the interests and well-being of students and make every effort to protect students from bullying and from physical or psychological abuse;
- f) Take all possible steps to safeguard students from sexual abuse;
- g) Exercise due care, diligence and confidentiality in all matters affecting the welfare of their students;
- h) Assist students to develop a set of values consistent with international human rights standards;
- i) exercise authority with justice and compassion; and,
- j) Ensure that the privileged relationship between teacher and student is not exploited in any way, particularly in order to proselytize or for ideological control.<sup>118</sup>

Parents must also cooperate with teachers to create violence-free schools.

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<sup>116</sup> *World Report on Violence against Children*, *ibid*, note 4, p. 143.

<sup>117</sup> The Declaration is mainly intended as a blueprint for EI affiliates' own guidelines. It is complementary to the 1998 International Labour Organisation Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and draws on the 1966 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers and the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

<sup>118</sup> Education International, *EI Declaration on Professional Ethics*, Article 2.

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In a focus group study of the system of school discipline in Nepal, both teachers and parents admitted that they beat children because they had also been beaten and humiliated in school and at home when they were children. They indicated that they were not aware of the negative consequences of violent methods of disciplining children and added that they had never considered alternatives to corporal punishment and verbal humiliation.<sup>119</sup> It was observed that children in turn internalize the view that violence is the only possible response when discipline is needed.<sup>120</sup> Recognizing that it is difficult, if not impossible, to address the school environment without also addressing the social and cultural contexts in which the school is located, participants in the focus group study expressed the opinion that teacher training courses alone would not be enough to protect children, since acts of violence and humiliation in the home would perpetuate this practice in the wider community. The majority of participants therefore asked for training workshops to be organized for parents as well as for teachers.<sup>121</sup>

### **Changing attitudes and addressing social norms**

Even where violent acts against children in schools are legally prohibited, in societies where violence is a norm, the cultural acceptability of these practices often leads to weak enforcement of the law.<sup>122</sup> Efforts to bring an end to violence in school must therefore seek to promote a change in attitudes of parents, families and wider communities. If children are exposed to violence in the home or on the street and understand it to be a legitimate means of conflict resolution, or recognize it as a means of establishing dominance or status, then it is more than likely that they will bring these values into their schools. Where this is the case, efforts to reduce violence in schools may need to be complemented by violence reduction initiatives in communities or parenting programmes in families.

The *World Report on Violence against Children* underlines the importance of addressing violence in schools according to the socio-economic context in which each school operates. The complexity of this issue is captured by Antonowicz in a study from West and Central Africa:

*School-based violence is not a problem confined to schools but a complex, multifaceted societal issue. Schools are social spaces within which the power relationships, domination and discrimination practices of the community and wider society are reflected. Violence against children in schools is linked to socio-cultural traditions, political agendas, the weakness of education systems, community practices, and to global macroeconomics. Conditional aid flows, as well as internal efficiency in education expenditure, impact on national education systems and can result in insufficient recruitment of teachers and cuts in teacher training budgets.*<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> UNICEF, *Violence against Children in Nepal: A Study of the System of School Discipline in Nepal*, p. vii.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, p. viii.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, p. viii.

<sup>122</sup> *Plan*, *ibid*, note 82, p. 16.

<sup>123</sup> Antonowicz, *ibid*, note 13, p. 4.

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In many cases, violence against children is a social norm: it may reflect power structures in society and be considered an appropriate measure to help a child learn and mature. In many countries in Africa, for example, school violence often persists in the name of tradition. A teacher from Ghana is quoted as saying: “The African child is brought up in a culture that uses canes as a form of punishment for children to learn and follow instructions. If we do not enforce the same practices, our schools will experience reduced academic standards.”<sup>124</sup> Likewise, a teacher from Afghanistan recounts that, “The traditional teaching method has been used for decades. It has strict rules and regulations and it allows teachers to beat and punish students [...] I remember a teacher who had beaten a student so badly that he had broken the student’s right hand.”<sup>125</sup> An analysis carried out in Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen indicates that,

*[t]he social and cultural context plays a significant role in the prevalence of all forms of violence in the schools of Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen[...]. In Lebanon reports have pointed out that there is a perceived distinction between “mild” and “serious” punishment that leaves the former socially acceptable. In Yemen, physical punishment is also generally accepted within the school context, and even teachers and administrators regard it to be in the interest of the child. It is considered to be an effective way of raising the child and has been inherited from one generation to another [...] This also applies to Morocco as most of the time parents are aware of physical punishment towards their child, but accept it, even if they do not use physical violence themselves.<sup>126</sup>*

Children themselves may internalize these values and come to see violence as an inherent element of their childhood, a valid strategy to achieve the imposition of discipline and, consequently, an appropriate means by which to negotiate their own status and position with their peers.

Curricula that include life skills and human rights education and that promote the values of social equality, tolerance toward diversity and non-violent means of resolving conflict can provide children with an alternative structure for understanding the world, even in situations where violence outside the school undermines their communities and impacts their lives.<sup>127</sup> The Council of Europe provides a set of six “Living Democracy” manuals for teachers that cover the age range from primary to secondary or high school, in addition to a compendium of good practice for human rights education from Europe, Central Asia and North America.

Religion is an important part of many people’s lives, and the major world religions value and respect the human dignity of children. The principles of compassion,

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>125</sup> Save the Children, “Haji Habibullah – Afghanistan”, Violence Free School project, case study, date of interview 10 April 2011.

<sup>126</sup> Seitz, Charmaine (ed), Save the Children, *Violence against Children in Schools: A Regional Analysis of Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>127</sup> *World Report on Violence against Children*, ibid, note 4, p. 142.



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justice, equality and non-violence are claimed by most people of faith to be at the centre of their religion. The Kyoto Declaration, agreed upon in 2006 by religious leaders of all faiths to combat violence against children, recommends that religious leaders and communities actively work to change attitudes and practices that perpetuate violence. All the same, religious texts may be used to tolerate, perpetuate and ignore the reality of violence against children, to the point that campaigns for legal reform to ban all forms of violence may encounter resistance from some religious communities and organizations.<sup>128</sup> The Churches' Network for Non-Violence, the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children and Save the Children Sweden have come together to produce a handbook addressing how religious communities can build on their inherent strengths to prevent violence against children in schools and elsewhere.

An important example comes from the Islamic Republic of Mauritania where corporal punishment is widely used in madrassahs (Islamic schools) and secular primary schools. At the invitation of UNICEF, the Imams and Religious Leaders Network for Child Rights carried out a study to assess whether corporal punishment is allowed in Islam. It concluded that violence had no place in the Quran. The results of this study formed the basis of a fatwa, or religious edict, prohibiting physical and verbal violence against children in schools and at home. The fatwa states:

*[...] it is necessary to desist immediately and finally from beating children, regardless of the pretext given. This is not only required by law and piety, or in accordance with the principles and purposes of the glorious Shariah, but it is also essential for the good of the child, the educator, the family and society. It is also necessary to adopt scientific educational methods in the upbringing of children following the example provided by the first educator and teacher, Mohammad may God be merciful to him, whose teachings are all kindness, love and goodness.*<sup>129</sup>

### **Securing children's legal protection**

Clear, unambiguous legislation that places a ban on all forms of violence against children, including violence in school, is a key component of any comprehensive national strategy to address violence against children. Legal prohibition of violence against children in schools and all other settings is vital for creating the conditions for successful local initiatives. It also sends out a strong message to parents, teachers, school authorities and communities as a whole that violence against children is unacceptable to the State.

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<sup>128</sup> Dodd, Chris, *Ending Corporal Punishment of Children. A handbook for working with and within religious communities*, p. 5.

<sup>129</sup> *On the Prohibition of Excessive Child Beating in Islamic Shariah (Law): Abstract of a Comprehensive Social, Educational and Legal Study of the Negative Impact of Child Beating, and the Rules Governing it in Islamic Shariah (Law)*, prepared by Professor Imam Amin Ould Al-Saleck, Imam of the Old Mosque, Nouakchott, and President of the Imams and Ulema Coalition for the Rights of Women and Children in Mauritania, June 2009, cited in Dodd, *ibid*, note 132, p. 63.

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Legislation that specifically addresses violence against children, such as that recently introduced in Kenya, Poland and Tunisia, is recognized as being more effective than general legislation prohibiting violence, abuse and assault, since general legislation is not always understood to cover the disciplining of children or to govern the situation in schools. In the case of Kenya, Article 29 of the new Constitution, which came into force in August 2010, prohibits all forms of violence from either public or private sources, a ban that is binding for all State organs and all persons. Article 53 provides that every child has the right to be protected from abuse, neglect, harmful cultural practices, all forms of violence, inhuman treatment and punishment, and hazardous or exploitative labour.<sup>130</sup>

Other countries have introduced legislation that specifically refers to the school context, as was recently the case in Peru and in Belize. To take another example, on 8 December 2006, the Mongolian Parliament passed major amendments to the country's education law, which now prohibits all forms of violence in education settings. It also introduced a Code of Conduct under which school managers and teachers are held responsible for respecting students' inherent dignity and right to privacy. Mechanisms for monitoring and regulating breaches of the Code have also been established.<sup>131</sup>

In India, where a 2007 report from the Ministry of Women and Child Development indicated that two out of three school-going children are subjected to physical abuse,<sup>132</sup> the Right of Children to Free Education Act of 2009 states that, “[n]o child shall be subjected to physical punishment or mental harassment” and indicates that, “[w]hoever contravenes the provision [...] shall be liable to disciplinary action under the service rules applicable to such person.”<sup>133</sup> The Act also provides for an important mechanism for monitoring the right of the child to education:

*The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights [...] or, as the case may be, the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights [...] shall [...] (a) examine and review the safeguards for rights provided by or under this Act and recommend measures for their effective implementation; (b) inquire into complaints relating to child's right to free and compulsory education; and (c) take necessary steps [...].*<sup>134</sup>

Furthermore, “any person having any grievance relating to the right of a child under this Act may make a written complaint to the local authority having jurisdiction.”<sup>135</sup> For the purposes of the Act, a child is defined as being between six and 14 years of age, in keeping with the ages of mandatory school attendance. This definition is not consistent with the definition of a child contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that is, anyone under the age of 18.

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<sup>130</sup> A/HRC/16/54, “Annual Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children, Marta Santos Pais”, 28 February 2011, §15(a).

<sup>131</sup> IPU and UNICEF, *Eliminating Violence against Children. Handbook for Parliamentarians*, p. 49.

<sup>132</sup> Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Child Abuse in India, 2007*, cited in National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), *Upholding Rights of Children. NCPCR 2007-2011*, p. 9.

<sup>133</sup> Government of India, “The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009”, §17.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, §31.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, §32.

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Worldwide progress towards the prohibition of all physical punishment in schools is monitored by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children.<sup>136</sup> As of May 2011, corporal punishment in schools is unlawful in 117 states, while 29 states have introduced legislation prohibiting corporal punishment in all settings, including schools and in the home.<sup>137</sup> A small number of countries - Norway, Peru, Portugal, South Korea, Sri Lanka, the UK and the US - have, in addition, introduced specific legislation to protect children against bullying.<sup>138</sup> There are also indications that legislation is beginning to address the phenomenon of cyber bullying: in July 2011, the State of California, USA, passed a bill allowing schools to suspend pupils who engage in bullying on social networking sites, in addition to those who use mobile phones and other internet services to bully and harass their peers. This follows similar legislation in the American State of Rhode Island.

As highlighted by the Special Representative on Violence against Children, the effectiveness of measures to deter and eliminate violence in schools is significantly undermined without a supportive legal framework.<sup>139</sup> The introduction of new legislation or the amendment of existing legislation to provide children with protection from violence - be it a general measure or a measure specifically directed at the school setting - is therefore indispensable, but it must also be reinforced by mechanisms to implement and enforce this legislation, as well as a monitoring system to assess its effectiveness. These have been identified as priorities by regional organizations, including the Council of Europe, the South Asian Initiative to End Violence against Children, the League of Arab States and the member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in its Cairo Declaration.<sup>140</sup> Crucially, enforcement mechanisms and monitoring systems must be allocated adequate and reliable budgets, a measure that also signals a Government's political commitment to addressing the issue.<sup>141</sup>

Legislation to protect children in schools cannot remain removed from the work of relevant educational institutions: it must be incorporated in their structures and practices and be reflected in the training and ethical standards of professionals in this field. Experience suggests that partnering with teachers' unions and education authorities is one of the most effective ways of enforcing legislation intended to protect children from violence in the school setting.<sup>142</sup>

The effectiveness of legislation also depends on awareness-raising among schoolchildren, parents, caregivers and the public at large and, in turn, the provision of appropriate complaint mechanisms. In Ukraine, it is reported that although there is

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<sup>136</sup> See [www.endcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org)

<sup>137</sup> Austria, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Kenya, Latvia, Lichtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, Ukraine, Uruguay and Venezuela. Figures from Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, *Prohibiting all corporal punishment in schools: Global Report*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>138</sup> Portugal's legislation, however, foresees penal penalties for young people involved in bullying.

<sup>139</sup> A/HRC/19/64, p. 13

<sup>140</sup> SRSRG on Violence against Children "Political Commitments by Regional Organizations and Institutions to Prevent and Address Violence against Children," New York, 2011.

<sup>141</sup> A/HRC/19/64, p. 11.

<sup>142</sup> Laurie, *ibid*, note 91, p. 16.

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clear legislation against violence against children in general, in addition to a prohibition against corporal punishment in schools and all other settings, there is currently no mechanism for children to complain directly to the police about violence or the threat of violence. The responsibility for reporting violence falls to a parent or teacher.

In Norway, which has introduced specific legislation to prevent bullying in schools, the government has galvanized all levels of society to action by means of a Manifesto against Bullying. In 2002, the Prime Minister initiated this Manifesto and invited all schools to participate in anti-bullying programmes. The initiative has continued to grow and now commits many important partners to preventing and combating bullying. The latest version of the Manifesto, from 2009-2010, is supported by government at all levels as well as by teaching unions and parents' committees.

*Norway's Anti-Bullying Manifesto 2009-2010*

Norway's Anti-Bullying Manifesto opens by identifying the key actors involved in preventing bullying and the aim toward which they are working:

We, the Stoltenberg Government, the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, Union of Education Norway, the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees, Norwegian Union of School Employees and the National Parents' Committee for Primary and Secondary Education commit ourselves to working to ensure that all children and teenagers have good, inclusive childhood and learning environments. Children and teenagers should not be subjected to abusive words or actions such as bullying, violence, racism, homophobia, discrimination or exclusion.

The Manifesto contains 35 concrete measures aimed at achieving the following seven goals:

- Children and teenagers experience a physical and psychosocial environment that promotes health, well-being and learning;
- Children and teenagers have their rights to participation and co-determination fulfilled in kindergarten, school and their leisure time;
- Everyone helps to ensure a good partnership in the best interests of children and teenagers, and parents and guardians are assured participation and co-determination;
- Adults understand that they have a responsibility to ensure that all children and teenagers are included in childhood and learning environments;
- Adults clearly act as adults and are good role models for children and teenagers;
- Everyone who is responsible for children and teenagers has good skills with respect to preventing and dealing with bullying;
- Everyone who works with children and teenagers has skills in creating values and attitudes among children, teenagers and adults.

The Anti-Bullying Manifesto underlines that the parties will work together to ensure that the legal provisions in this area are followed up.

Professional guidelines are important to set standards of non-violence. In Bangladesh which, with some 81,443 schools, has the biggest primary education system in the world, the illegality of corporal punishment has not yet been confirmed in legislation; however, it has been ruled unlawful under a Supreme Court ruling of 2011. Since 21 April 2011, teachers in Bangladesh have a clear set of guidelines produced by the Ministry of Education regarding, "the prohibition of corporal and mental punishment of students in educational institutions". The guidelines open with a statement of the

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Government's commitment, "to ensuring children's rights and providing a healthy environment for the mental growth of children in all educational institutions of the country."<sup>143</sup> They go on to state that,

*A teacher or any person involved in the teaching profession or any officer or employee of any concerned educational institution, during studies or at any other time, shall not act towards any student in any manner which is treated as a punishment [as defined in the Guidelines]. Any direct or indirect involvement with any offence defined [in the Guidelines] shall be considered to be a contravention of the Government Servants (Conduct) Rules, 1979 and shall also be considered to be a punishable offence. Penal action may be taken against any such person on a complaint of misconduct under the Government Servants (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1985. If necessary, action may also be taken under criminal law against such person.*<sup>144</sup>

Importantly, these guidelines also include a provision concerning dissemination - whereby the appropriate officials, "shall together undertake dissemination activities to prohibit physical and mental punishment in educational institutions" - as well as measures to provide the "necessary financial support to implement the measures."<sup>145</sup>

Moreover, decisive regional policy initiatives provide an important context for the development of national legislation. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has demonstrated a high level of commitment in this area, most recently with the passing of resolution 1803 on "Education against violence at school".<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Ministry of Education. Law Cell, "Circular no. 37.031.004.02.00.138.2010-151", 21 April, 2011.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid

<sup>145</sup> Ibid

<sup>146</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Resolution 1803 (2001), "Education against violence at school". In 2006 the Council of Europe launched "Building a Europe for and with children", a transversal programme that supports Council of Europe member states to devise and implement holistic and integrated children's rights strategies. The 2009-2011 Council of Europe Children's Rights Strategy defines the programme's priorities as: continuing to promote the mainstreaming of children's rights in the fields of democracy, media, health and family policies; promoting children's access to justice; eradicating all forms of violence against children; promoting children's participation and influence in society; and promoting the rights of particularly vulnerable children. The Council of Europe is currently preparing a new strategy on the Rights of the Child for the years 2012-2015, to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers in early 2012.

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### *Resolution 1803 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*

Resolution 1803 draws attention to five guiding principles to promote education against violence in schools. The first calls for a clear and comprehensive legal framework that includes penal and/or disciplinary standards, complaints mechanisms, and mechanisms for investigating and recording of acts of violence. It also refers to the importance of administrative procedures relating to acts of violence in school that guarantee the rights of parents to be fully and promptly informed, and the right of victims of violence to the protection of privacy.

Secondly, the resolution points to the importance of raising awareness about violence reduction among children, including through appropriate curricula, and of mandatory training for teachers and staff to help them better understand and address the phenomenon of violence in schools.

The third principle calls for preventive and supportive measures, including security measures to make schools safer environments, inclusive teaching methods to ensure support for pupils of all abilities, the presence of specialized counsellors among school staff, and the availability of mediators and psychologists for pupils, their parents and teachers. This principle also calls for a specialized team within each school district to provide advice to schools facing particular difficulties.

The fourth principle addresses the involvement of pupils and their families and identifies the importance of practical projects and extracurricular activities on the issue of violence at school that bring together pupils, teachers and parents. It also underlines the importance of collaborating with NGOs that have specific knowledge and experience in this field.

The fifth and final principle refers to monitoring and assessment and recommends that national authorities establish a centralized system of data concerning violence at school and the results achieved by the different measures implemented to eradicate this phenomenon. It also calls for national surveys to be conducted to identify good practices and encourages cooperation among schools at both national and regional levels.

### **Consolidating data and research**

Data and research are indispensable for capturing the hidden dimension of violence and addressing its root causes. They enhance understanding of perceptions and attitudes in relation to this phenomenon, including among girls and boys of different ages and social backgrounds, and help to identify children at greater risk to help provide them with effective support. In terms of national planning, research based on comprehensive data can inter alia, help quantify the economic cost of violence and identify the social returns that can be achieved with steady investment in prevention.

Despite the importance of collecting, analyzing and disseminating data related to violence in schools, this is an area where significant challenges remain. Child victims and their families may be frightened or reluctant to report incidents of violence, or may be unaware of how to do so, while governments or education authorities may not consider collection of data of this kind a priority, in part because of the institutionalized nature of violence in schools.<sup>147</sup> The result is that available information is often sketchy and analysis is limited. Without reliable data, national planning is compromised, effective policymaking and resource mobilization are hampered, and targeted interventions are limited in their ability to address and prevent violence against children in schools and elsewhere. For this reason, assessing progress in violence prevention and responses is a priority area of concern for the mandate of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children.

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<sup>147</sup> Perezneito, *ibid*, note 6, p. vi.

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Data from some regions tend to be more readily available than others. Thus, for example, the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe collaborates with the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children research study to promote understanding of young people's health and well-being, their health behaviours and their social context. One aspect of the study involves collecting data in countries on issues such as bullying and physical fighting. Extending initiatives of this kind would go a long way toward compiling a global picture of violence in schools. Surveys intended to assess levels of school attendance or to identify reasons for non-attendance can also help improve the evidence base by including questions that refer explicitly to violence in schools. They can thus help throw light on the prevalence and nature of violence in schools and draw attention to the pressing need for an effective response.

In addition to the direct and immediate assistance they provide, telephone helplines represent another important source of violence-related statistics. The reach of telephone helplines is illustrated by Child Helpline International, a global network of child helplines with members in 133 countries worldwide.<sup>148</sup> Resources such as these can complement or reinforce government initiatives to compile comprehensive, disaggregated data on violence against children in schools and elsewhere, but they should not substitute such initiatives. Norway's 2009-2010 Anti-Bullying Manifesto, discussed above, contains a clear commitment by all parties to ensure that the measures in the manifesto are, to the extent possible, based on knowledge about what works. The parties also undertake to improve their understanding of bullying, including through research.<sup>149</sup>

Beyond the compilation and analysis of national data, there is a clear requirement for further research in order to better grasp the dynamics of violence in schools and to understand which approaches work best in different contexts. School audits – which allow schools themselves to understand and recognize their role in preventing and minimizing violence – represent an important resource in this respect: “[a]udits are a process through which a school is able to understand better its relative position in relation to a particular area of school life. Based on a clearer understanding of the problem [...] a school is then in a better position to take both preventive and remedial action.”<sup>150</sup> School audits seek to measure or research the nature and level of violence in a school, produce a time-bound action plan based on this analysis, and then monitor the implementation of that plan. Further, if audits have a similar format, they allow for comparisons to be drawn.

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<sup>148</sup> For example, statistics from Egypt, Paraguay, Sweden and Zimbabwe are provided in Bazan, C., *Using child helplines to protect children from school violence*.

<sup>149</sup> The Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, *ibid*, note 152, p. 6.

<sup>150</sup> Galvin, Peter, “The role of a school audit in preventing and minimizing violence” in Gittins, Chris (coordinator), *Violence reduction in schools – how to make a difference*, Council of Europe, 2006, p. 24.

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Data for an audit are derived from four main areas:

- an examination of written documentation relevant to the prevention and effective response to violence in schools;
- observations in a number of settings – classrooms, assemblies, corridors, lunch halls and social areas;
- questionnaires and interviews for representatives of the whole school community, including pupils, teachers and other staff, principals, parents and caregivers and governors;
- school based data relating to areas such as verbal and physical violence, bullying and corporal punishment.<sup>151</sup>

A detailed guide to preparing a school audit is included in the Council of Europe publication *Violence reduction in schools – how to make a difference*.<sup>152</sup>

Establishing a baseline at the start of a project, monitoring the project's ongoing implementation and engaging in follow-up assessments at the end of a project not only reinforces the credibility of initiatives, but also provides important information on what strategies work best to obtain sustainable results. This was the explicit aim behind the decision of the Bernard Van Leer Foundation to evaluate its Human Dignity programme in schools in Israel at the end of the programme, and then again one year later.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>152</sup> Gittins, Chris (coordinator), *Violence reduction in schools – how to make a difference*.



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### Assessing the Human Dignity Programme

Bernard van Leer Foundation's Human Dignity programme starts from the idea that the resources necessary for generating positive systemic change in schools are already present in the form of principals, staff and students. The only new element added by the programme is a facilitator who accompanies the school through a three-year process of positive change.

The process begins with the principal looking anew at school culture and dynamics and his or her role within this, aided by the facilitator. Human dignity levels within the school at the start of the process are assessed with the help of questionnaires completed by staff and students, as well as through discussions.

Teams to lead the process of change are convened, and a series of workshops on mutual respect and dignity – both as general values and within the school routine – are held for teachers. Later, teachers are supported in taking key ideas and reworking them along with the students in the class, and then developing mechanisms to embed mutual respect in relationships within the classroom and across the school, between individuals and within groups.

In 2004, the Human Dignity programme was launched in nine schools across Israel, including secular and religious Jewish schools and Arab schools. In July 2007, at the end of the three-year implementation period, programme coordinators carried out an internal assessment of the programme.

The resulting report indicated that the central challenge during the programme's final year was to ensure the continuity of the process through that year and beyond. The findings presented in the final report formed the reference point for a "one year after" evaluation, which compared the situations at the programme's start and conclusion with those encountered during site visits in the course of the evaluation. These visits were carried out during May and June of 2008.

It was found that a human dignity culture was maintained at schools that integrate two distinct modes of behaviour: that is, adopting a dignified and respectful norm of conducting personal relations with students, and upholding a clear and uniformly recognized system of rules and regulations. It was found that emphasis on only one of these factors was unlikely to generate significant long-term change.

The assessment concluded that in schools where the programme was successful, rules were created through a respectful process: problems were first identified, then relevant parties were included in making the necessary decisions to address these issues, new norms were propagated and an on-going process of assimilation took place throughout the school. The assessment concluded that,

Schools that successfully implemented the programme were found to have no central mechanism for propagating human dignity, but rather a system of many smaller mechanisms to be found at various junctures: between the principal and the teachers, between teachers and students, and among the students themselves.

Dozens of mechanisms were created, each being designed to address a specific issue, with one overall goal in common: to find solutions enabling the school to maintain a climate of human dignity.

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#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on the World Report on Violence against Children, this report advances the concept of a rights-based, child-friendly school as a means to reduce and eliminate violence against children. Such schools are proactively inclusive, academically effective and relevant, gender sensitive, healthy and protective, and engaged with the family and community.<sup>153</sup>

Cultivating values of tolerance and dignity both inside and outside the school requires schools to operate as inclusive structures. Exclusion perpetuates privilege, prejudice, discrimination, divisive thinking and social tensions. A school that fails to cultivate positive values and social inclusion may succeed in managing violence through specific initiatives of a limited scope, but it is unlikely to become truly violence-free, or to serve a true catalyst for lasting change in the community.

On the other hand, a school that includes all children is good for all children. Intercultural, inclusive education – that is, learning that promotes respect for and understanding of other cultures and caters for all children, irrespective of their individual characteristics – is a key element in eliminating discrimination and increasing respect among children and between teaching staff and pupils. In other words, diversity can become a pedagogical resource that contributes to a better and safer educational experience for all children, and this experience has the potential to spread beyond the school into society as a whole. To return to Bush and Saltarelli's metaphor of the two faces of education, the positive face reflects,

*the cumulative benefits of the provision of good quality education. These include the conflict-dampening impact of educational opportunity, the promotion of linguistic tolerance, the nurturing of ethnic tolerance, and the 'disarming' of history.*<sup>154</sup>

Schools must nevertheless anticipate the possibility of violence and ensure that procedures are in place to deal with such incidents. Addressing incidents of violence also calls for schools to create opportunities for reconciliation, support and counselling, and reparation.

Thanks to the work of a range of committed actors, there is a growing body of information available on how to tackle violence in and around schools and provide children with a safe environment in which to grow and learn. Some countries have taken the lead in implementing most promising approaches, while others still have some way to go. Opportunities to share this accumulated experience are therefore crucial for advancing the goal of violence-free schools, moving toward violence-free societies and generating commitment to positive change for children around the world. With this in mind, this report has examined a number of elements that are essential to the development of rights-based, violence-free schools. This examination gives rise to the following recommendations for governments committed to eliminating violence in the school system:

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<sup>153</sup> World Report on Violence against Children, *ibid*, note, 4, p. 138.

<sup>154</sup> Bush, *ibid*, note 69, p. v.

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- 1) **Promote violence-prevention programmes that address the whole school environment and encourage community outreach.** This may require strengthening links between schools and communities and raising awareness of the value of schools as community resources; as well as addressing violence in schools through complementary efforts with communities and families to reduce violence against children in the home and elsewhere. These programmes should be linked to a national child protection system and involve education authorities, local and national government. This also means that physical spaces in and around the school need to be adequately supervised and present no danger to children.
  - 2) **Secure children's legal protection from violence** by introducing effective legislation that explicitly prohibits all forms of violence against children in all settings, including in schools, setting out clear penalties for those who perpetrate violence against children, and providing systems of redress and rehabilitation for victims of violence. To advance this process, it is critical to assign adequate budgetary resources to ensure effective dissemination, enforcement and monitoring of progress.
  - 3) **Ensure that children have access to confidential counselling, complaints and reporting mechanisms** should they or others be subjected to violence in school, in the home or in any other setting. Likewise, ensure that school staff is aware of how to recognize cases of violence and know whom to approach and refer violence cases. There must be a clear contact protocol for police and other authorities in the case of serious incidents of violence.
  - 4) **Partner with children, listen to them and work with them.** Recognize the potential contribution of children to the creation of violence-free schools and provide appropriate structures, such as student councils, for their formal participation in school management. Ensure that children have access to human rights education, education for citizenship and skills training on mediation and peaceful resolution of conflicts.
  - 5) **Create a child-friendly and safe school environment by recruiting qualified teachers, including female teachers,** securing their fair remuneration and dignifying working conditions, investing in teacher training on children's rights and developing school regulations, accountability mechanisms and code of conducts that address all forms of harassment and violence against children.
  - 6) **Work with relevant actors to promote change in attitudes and norms that condone or perpetuate violence against children** in schools, at home and in the community. Offer alternative models of discipline to parents and teachers, and train all school staff in non-violent approaches to education. Ensure that curricula and teaching materials promote positive values and tolerance. Encourage teachers' organizations and unions to support their members in developing violence-free learning environments.
  - 7) **Assign particular attention to gender issues** and ensure that lessons and teaching materials promote gender equality. Introduce a gender dimension into

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life-skills lessons for both boys and girls. Train teachers and other staff to address gender discrimination and gender-based violence.

- 8) **Ensure that children from vulnerable groups are enrolled and kept in school**, and give special attention to their learning requirements to provide them with relevant skills and minimize drop-out. Cultivate inclusive values and tolerance toward children of all backgrounds and abilities. Address the different risks to children's vulnerability, such as economic factors including school fees, and consider special risks faced by girls living in poverty which may lead to sexual abuse by school personnel or sugar daddies to support girls' education.
- 9) **Raise parents' awareness of the risk of cyber-bullying** in its various forms and introduce initiatives in schools to encourage informed and responsible on-line behaviour on the part of children. Provide digital skills training for children to deal with the phenomenon. Encourage internet providers and social networking sites to provide adequate filtering and blocking tools.
- 10) **Strengthen research and consolidate data systems on all forms of violence against children**, disaggregated by age and sex at a minimum. Promote analysis and dissemination of data in order to inform national and local policies to prevent and eliminate violence in schools.
- 11) **Reinforce international co-operation, coordination and sharing of knowledge** of good practices, programmes and evidence-based research to end violence against children. Strengthen international earmarked funding to ending all forms of violence against children.

These recommendations address key issues discussed in this report and are by no means exhaustive. Taken as a whole, however, they provide a solid foundation on which to build learning environments for children free from violence, fear and discrimination.

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The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children is an independent global advocate in favour of the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children, mobilizing action and political support to achieve progress the world over. The mandate of the SRSG is anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments and framed by the UN Study on Violence against Children.



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