

THE UN STUDY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN: A Preliminary Guide to NGO Involvement Including formation of an NGO Advisory Group

Children throughout the world are at risk of violence in nearly every aspect of their lives—in their homes, in schools, on the street, at work, in institutions and in detention. In many cases, they are beaten, tortured, sexually assaulted or even murdered by the very individuals responsible for their care.

In response to this global scandal, in November of 2001 the UN General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to conduct an in-depth study on violence against children. This request followed a recommendation for such a study from the Committee on the Rights of the Child, based on two days of general discussion on violence against children held in 2000 and 2001. The Committee stated that the study should be as "thorough and influential" as the groundbreaking 1996 study on children and armed conflict conducted by Mrs. Graça Machel.

Goals: The goals of the study are to:

- raise international visibility of all forms of violence against children;
- better understand the causes of the problem and its impact on children, adults and societies;
- assess existing mechanisms to address violence against children;
- identify an international action plan to effectively end these abuses.

Scope: The Committee recommended that the study should cover violence against children within the family and in the home, in schools, in care or residential institutions both State and private, in work situations, in the streets, in detention facilities and prisons, and also examine violence by police and the use of capital and physical punishment. The Committee recommended that violence should include all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, including sexual abuse, bullying in schools, and corporal punishment.

UN Support: Three UN agencies, UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights have formed a partnership to support the study. Other UN and UN related bodies are also expected to be involved in the study's preparation, including the ILO, UNESCO, UNIFEM, and others.

On April 26, the UN Commission on Human Rights welcomed the General Assembly's request for the study, and encouraged the Secretary General to appoint an independent expert to direct the study. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, UNICEF executive director Carol Bellamy and WHO director-general Gro Brundtland have also jointly recommended to the Secretary-General that he appoint an independent expert. Such an expert is seen by many NGOs as essential to the study's visibility and impact.

Key elements for the study: More than 30 NGOs joined together in April 2002 to issue a position paper outlining several essential elements for the study:

- Basing the study on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the recommendations of the Committee;
- Appointment of an independent expert;
- Establishment of an independent secretariat;
- Meaningful participation by children;
- Involvement of NGOs.

Opportunities for NGO Involvement: These are some of the possible levels and forms for involvement by the full range of non-governmental organizations – organizations involved in children’s rights and welfare, professional organizations, child- and young people-led organizations, faith groups, human rights institutions, academic institutions and so on:

- **National Networks and Coalitions:** National NGOs are encouraged to form and/or use existing national networks or coalitions to begin collecting relevant information for the study, prepare consultations about violence against children in their country, and plan ways to follow-up the study and its recommendations.
- **Sub-group on Violence and Children:** The NGO Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child has established a new subgroup on violence against children. The subgroup will work to engage NGOs in the preparation and follow-up to the study, to engage the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other UN mechanisms on violence against children, and to seek ways to ensure that commitments made related to violence against children at the UN Special Session on Children are fulfilled. To join the sub-group, send an e-mail indicating your interest and confirming your support for full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the group’s co-conveners, Melanie Gow, World Vision International (melanie_gow@wvi.org) and Jo Becker, Human Rights Watch (beckerj@hrw.org).
- **Violence against Children E-mail list:** The Subgroup is establishing a new e-mail list to facilitate communication with NGOs about the study. The e-mail list will provide information on how NGOs can contribute to the study, regular updates as the study progresses, and information on regional consultations and other related events. To sign up to the e-mail list, send a message to ***childrenandviolence-subscribe@domeus.co.uk***
- **NGO Advisory Group:** A small advisory group will advise on all aspects of the establishment of the Study, provide the independent expert and study secretariat with input on the study’s content, process and outcomes, encourage and facilitate broad and effective NGO involvement in the study, and help mobilize effective follow-up to the study.

Formation of the NGO Advisory Group: Nominations are invited by August 1, 2002 for membership in the NGO Advisory Group for the UN Study. Members must:

- be committed to full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- have expertise in violence against children, including in one or more areas to be covered by the study;
- be willing to commit sufficient time to contribute actively to the group;
- have backing from their organization; and
- have access to wider networks of relevant organizations.

Members will be appointed as individuals with personal expertise as well as organizational backing.

Advisory Group members will be selected by a panel drawn from the Subgroup on Violence and Children. Members will be chosen to ensure regional and gender balance, expertise across the range of topics to be covered by the study, and representation of different sectors of NGOs, including advocacy, operational, professional, children and youth-led organizations, human rights institutions, etc. The group is expected to have 20-25 members. English will be the primary language of communication.

To make a nomination: To nominate an individual for the NGO Advisory Group, please send brief details by e-mail, requesting a nomination form to: Melanie Gow, melanie_gow@wvi.org. Please include “Advisory Group Nomination” in the subject line of your message.