

**OUTCOMES OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL GIRL CHILD CONFERENCE  
9 – 10 MARCH 2009, THE HAGUE, THE NETHERLANDS**

*In general, the participants in the March 2009 Hague Girl Child Conference:*

1. Welcome the Dutch government's contribution to the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) on violence against children, and invite other UN member states to follow this example;
2. Urge the UN Secretary-General to appoint the Special Representative on violence against children as soon as possible, so that he or she can begin implementing the mandate without further delay;
3. Invite the Special Representative on violence against children to start addressing the position of the girl child as soon as possible;
4. Recognise the importance of innovative approaches within the community, self-help and other programmes, and best practices. Real change is only possible if it comes from within, at local level, and has political support;
5. Welcome the Child Rights Home in Leiden and other best practices such as child helplines, and pledge to promote these or similar initiatives in various other countries;
6. Pledge to use the conference and its outcomes as advocacy tools to combat violence against girls at different levels (local, national, international), using the media to expose and combat cruel practices where possible;
7. Call on the Dutch government to encourage other governments to move combating violence against the girl child up the agenda; and to continue to promote interagency cooperation between actors such as UNICEF, OHCHR, WHO and the ILO;
8. Urge all governments to take a leading role in combating violence against girls, and to take ownership of the problem. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the framework for action;
9. Recommend that regional organisations such as the Council of Europe, the African Union, the Organisation of American States and the European Union actively promote effective and adequate measures to prevent violence against children, with special focus on girls and their right to be protected from all forms of violence;
10. Underline the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships (government, civil society, international organisations, corporate business) in making progress in combating violence against girls;
11. Underline the importance of child and youth participation in solving the problem;
12. Welcome the suggestion that the conference's website be maintained, so that participants can keep in touch and continue to collect and share best practices and experiences in connection with combating violence against the girl child in the home and family;
13. Welcome a follow-up in November, to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, where the government of the Netherlands will present the overall results of the Girl Child Conference.

*More specifically, the participants in the March 2009 Hague Girl Child Conference:*

***On the subtheme child abuse – See and Act:***

1. Urge all actors involved in preventing and combating child abuse not to compete with each other, but to cooperate as effectively as possible;
2. Advise governments to monitor and supervise cooperation between these actors, using specific targets, indicators and benchmarks;
3. Invite actors to See and Act: when reporting child abuse, be prepared to contribute to solving the problem. Government and non-governmental actors should cooperate, organising and funding the programmes and measures necessary;
4. Equip communities to solve problems: do not over-professionalise, and acknowledge that child abuse is everybody's problem; make resources available to the community.

***On the subtheme parenting – Helping Parents:***

1. Recommend that a multidisciplinary approach targeting, and involving, both adults and children be based on existing programmes: different disciplines can work together;
2. Recommend extending the UN database on violence against children set up for Professor Pinheiro's UN Violence Study, using it as a forum to exchange experience and best practices on adjusting different programmes to different social and cultural settings;
3. Recommend making parenting a mainstream issue, using children's rights as a framework;
4. Advise that an international rating system be set up, to enable comparison of successful policies per country.

***On the subtheme girls and the internet – Outcomes of World Congress III:***

1. Support research into identifying factors that may protect girls from internet abuse (e.g. age, education, parental involvement);
2. Recommend that we learn more about how perpetrators operate, so that we can introduce more effective anti-abuse measures;
3. Recommend that governments require internet service providers (ISPs) to report and remove abusive websites;
4. Recommend conducting further research into, and evaluation of internet abuse, focusing on education and awareness raising, with the involvement of children;
5. Support the development and effective implementation of Codes of Conduct for ISPs.

***On the subtheme domestic violence – The Girl Child: Witness and Victim of Domestic Violence:***

1. Acknowledge that violence against girls can be prevented by improving the education of girls and boys, professionals working with children and young people, and parents;
2. Acknowledge that every child that witnesses domestic violence reacts in a different way and therefore requires an individual approach;
3. Advise governments and civil society in industrialised countries to broaden their perspectives by participating in working visits to less privileged countries, exchanging and comparing knowledge and experiences and thus improving awareness of the universal needs of children;
4. Advise that the number of specialists, and the amount of grassroots work, be increased;
5. Advise governments and all relevant actors to continue to invest in parental participation and the participation and involvement of children and young people.

***On the subtheme female genital mutilation/cutting – Power of the Community:***

1. Recommend that governments improve the collection of disaggregated, reliable data in order to enhance the effectiveness of their actions to eradicate FGM/C, and call on the UN (WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, CRC Committee) to support governments in their efforts to do so;
2. Advise governments and NGOs to adopt a holistic approach and facilitate the building of bridges between communities in the countries of origin and diaspora organisations in Europe, with a view to inspiring both to abandon FGM/C. This will encourage such communities to take matters into their own hands and develop strategies adapted to their own context (i.e. inclusiveness). For example:
  - a. A high level of expertise is available at grassroots level. This should be drawn on much more frequently. Ensure that the necessary financial and other resources are available;
  - b. Develop exchange programmes at community level between countries, especially European and African countries;
  - c. Extend the text message (SMS) network between Africa and diaspora in European countries (initiated by UNICEF New York);
  - d. Adopt a holistic approach: FGM is not an isolated issue;
  - e. Set up a network of inter-religious authorities, allowing leaders of different religions to take a stand against FGM, e.g. at conferences;
  - f. Improve the self-reliance and empowerment of immigrant women in Europe;
  - g. Make more frequent use of the media and internet, since this is a powerful tool for stimulating national dialogue;
  - h. Include youngsters in activities: as tomorrow's parents, they have an important role to play;
  - i. Involve famous role models as agents of change;
  - j. Strengthen existing networks rather than creating new ones.

***On the subtheme forced and early marriage – You have a Right to Choose:***

1. Recommend that the practice of early marriage be abandoned, and emphasise that this is everybody's responsibility (government, NGOs, the community and individuals), and empower girls and communities to make the change: awareness, mobilisation, action and protection are key;
2. Emphasise the urgency of abandoning the practice of early marriage, especially in the context of the current financial crisis; emphasise the importance of legislation, e.g. registering the birth and marriage of girls and raising the age of marriage;
3. Advise that safe spaces be created where girls can meet, learn about their rights and form bonds with other girls and women;
4. Advise that the prevention of and response to forced and early marriage be included in the curriculum of relevant professionals (health professionals, judges, lawyers, police, teachers etc);
5. Acknowledge that communities have to be involved in drawing up effective measures to stop the practice of forced and early marriage: trust and sustainable cooperation are the key.

***On the subtheme honour-related violence (HRV) against girls – No more Violence, more Honour:***

1. Recommend that religious leaders from all faiths be involved in human rights/HRV issues;
2. Recommend that peer-to-peer projects be implemented within communities (boys, girls, fathers and mothers);

3. Recommend that governments collect systematically and adequately disaggregated data on HRV at national and community level;
4. Recommend that governments abolish legal provisions which treat HRV more leniently than similar, non-honour-related crimes, and lift formal barriers to the return of abandoned girls.

***On the subtheme son preference – Transforming Son Preference into Non-Preference:***

1. Acknowledge that new interpretations of relevant laws are needed in order to re-define the concept of family to extend participation to all living in the domestic domain (girls, the disabled, domestic workers);
2. Recommend that governments amend family and other law that discriminates against girls, with a view to ensuring that they receive equal treatment and have equal chances in life;
3. Advise that role models among girls and boys, young people, families, community leaders, organisations, MPs and civil servants be encouraged, as they can act as agents of change. They should be put in contact with each other, to strengthen their advocacy of equality of the sexes;
4. Recommend supporting efforts to make the education system (including formal, non-formal and informal education), sport organisations, the media and other relevant actors more gender sensitive;
5. Advise support for all organisations working to demystify myths and reconstruct new perceptions of girls and boys, in the interests of producing new narratives on equality. This process of reconstruction and narratives needs to be stimulated at personal, community and national level. Channels through which this process will be realised need to be contextualised. For example, film might be an appropriate vehicle in India, while theatre might be better suited in Pakistan, and rap/oral history in West Africa.