



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON
VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Child Helpline International - 10th International Consultation

Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence
against Children

Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid

Opening Session

Tuesday 27 September

10.00am – 11.30am

Your Majesty, distinguished participants, dear friends,

It is a pleasure to join you for the 10th International Consultation of Child Helplines.

Child helplines are an essential part of building a safe, protective and empowering environment for children. That's why throughout my career, I have supported the critical role child helplines play, and constantly work towards supporting them.

Reflecting on this experience and the current situation facing children globally, I would like to share three key messages.

1. Child helplines are needed more than ever

Due to the impact of the pandemic and the various and ongoing crisis, more children than ever are experiencing violence in all settings.

More children than ever are facing extreme poverty, discrimination, and social inequalities.

More children than ever are forcibly displaced, fleeing conflicts, climate crisis, widespread violence, food insecurity.

Criminal networks are increasingly taking advantage of these vulnerabilities to sell, buy and exploit children

No country is immune, and no child is immune!

Exposure to violence can have devastating effects on children's development and on their physical and mental health. The harm can last a lifetime.

When faced with these challenges, children need somewhere to turn. They need someone to talk to. They need a safe pathway to seek advice, to get support and to help them stay resilient.

Child helplines can provide this safe pathway.

With increasing violence caused by the ongoing crises worldwide, it is no surprise that mental health and violence continue to be the two main reasons for contact reported by members of Child Helpline International globally.

It would also come as no surprise to me if this trend continued, due to the alarming and increasing crisis, worldwide.

That is why the network of child helplines must be considered expanded and strengthened, not just at national but also at local levels.

Child helplines must be considered as a key element of child and gender sensitive protection systems and duly connected with all other services, including education, health, welfare, law enforcement, justice and social protection

And they must be truly accessible to all children, especially children who are marginalized and hardest to reach.

2. Child helplines can further enhance their use of the internet

Like many other child protection actors, child helplines had to adapt to the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. One way of doing that was to increase their capacity to reach children using online means.

As you all know, Child Helpline International reports have evidenced how helplines have had to increase their number of online volunteers given the rising number of children turning to digital platforms for support. Also, during COVID, children's actions evidenced an increase of the use of digital platforms to access services and to provide peer guidance.

This provides an illustration of how the internet can be a source of protection for children, not just a source of risk or harm. While global efforts are being taken forward to ensure every child has access to the Internet, we also need to make sure that through these means they can access the help and support they need.

It is in light of this that my office launched the Protection through Online Participation Initiative, in partnership with Child Helpline International, the International Telecommunication Union, the UK Safer Internet Center, other UN agencies, Civil Society Organizations and private sector partners. The initiative is aimed at better understanding how children use online means to access safety and protection, by identifying the challenges and benefits of using the Internet to support children from harms online and offline.

The lessons learned from the experience of child helplines will be crucial to understanding what works and what doesn't in using online means to ensure children have access to reliable, timely, and trustworthy protection resources.

These lessons will help shape recommendations for States, the tech industry, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders on improving online protection services.

3. Children are our best guides

Worldwide, children are increasingly at the forefront of initiatives for positive and sustainable social change.

Their creativity, solidarity, commitment and practicality never cease to inspire me.

They are our best guides in building safe, inclusive and empowering pathways to access information and support.

They are the ones who are best placed to tell us how what they need and what works.

If we want to truly be in alert mode, to anticipate rather than just react to risks and challenges such as those created by the pandemic and humanitarian crisis, this engagement with children is crucial.

For my mandate, children's meaningful participation is a cross cutting priority. In our efforts to amplify their actions, we have launched a digital participation map, with initiatives from over 100 countries. From the information we receive from children themselves, we are seeing how they are coming up with innovative solutions to addressing the protection needs of their peers.

They must be involved in designing, implementing and monitoring solutions, including those related to child helplines. But they must also be duly protected during these processes. It is our responsibility to ensure their right to participation, but also to being protected from all forms of violence.

Dear friends, the world made a promise to end all violence against children by 2030. With less than eight years left until then, our goal keeps moving farther away. We need to do more, better and faster, for and with children, leaving no child behind.

This consultation is part of that effort. It provides an invaluable opportunity to come together, to share information and experience, ideas and viewpoints, success stories and best practices.

And it also provides a space to be frank about what we could all do better to keep children safe.

Investing in cross-sectoral child and gender-sensitive child protection systems, of which helplines are a key element, is needed more than ever

I remain fully committed to working with all of you to achieve that end and look forward to our discussions today.

Thank you