

Position Statement from the Expert Consultation on Violence and Alternative Care
21st PAN AMERICAN CHILD CONGRESS

Brasilia, 8 December 2014 As part of the commemoration of the 21st Pan American Child Congress and considering the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 5th anniversary of the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, the Government of Brazil, together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Latin American and Caribbean Chapter of the Global Movement for Children, and the NGO Group on Children without Parental Care based in New York, convened an international consultation on the elimination of violence against children in alternative care.

This consultation brought together experts, government representatives, the United Nations System, the Inter-American Children's Institute, and civil society to exchange promising practices and strategic actions for the implementation of the provisions of the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, as well as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' recent report on "The Right of Boys and Girls to a Family. Alternative Care. Ending Institutionalization in the Americas."

In addition to being among the most unequal societies in the world, Latin America and the Caribbean has the highest rates of violence, especially affecting women and children at home and in the family. A frequently used response by childcare systems to the problem of violence against children, especially at home and in the family, is the separation of children from their families and their placement in a care institution.

The United Nations Global Study on Violence against Children is quite clear in identifying care and protection institutions as one of the main settings where violence against children occurs.

A significant proportion of children are placed in alternative care after experiencing different forms of violence. Although protecting children from all forms of violence is an essential right, to exercise this right proper legislation and child protection systems should be in place.

Considering that the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children guide the policy and practice; the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' report on The Right of Boys and Girls to a Family; and the Call to Action for de-institutionalisation of children under three years of age,

Government representatives, the United Nations' Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Latin American and Caribbean Chapter of the Global Movement for Children, and the civil society urge

the Inter-American Children's Institute:

- to take a stand on its commitment to de-institutionalisation of children and to their right to grow up in a violence-free environment.

- to take a work approach to implementing the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children based on the recommendations of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Report and the UNVAC study.

the States:

- to ensure that the 21st Pan American Child Congress Resolution prioritises the implementation of the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children and the recommendations of the UNVAC study in order to protect the right of children to grow up in a violence-free environment. Similarly, setting goals and indicators to monitor progress and challenges to this commitment takes into account the recommendations of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Report;
- to develop public policies and programmes for family and community strengthening from an integrated rights-based approach, allocating proper financial and human resources for their implementation;
- to design and maintain an information system with specific data on the subject;
- to ensure a de-institutionalisation process for children under three years of age in line with the Call to Action and the elimination of large scale institutions;
- to supervise and monitor the entire alternative care system, including different public or private care options;
- to legally prohibit physical and humiliating punishment in all respects; and
- to include the elimination of violence against children in the global post-2015 development agenda.

Along these lines, civil society organisations, UNICEF, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the United Nations' Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children commit themselves through platforms for discussion and exchange of good practices and promotion of the necessary changes for transformation from civil society:

- to promote and assist in the development of public policies and programmes for family and community strengthening and fostering participation of children, families and communities so that their realities and views are taken into account for their development;
- to support the development of information management and monitoring systems as well as continuous awareness-raising and training for stakeholders;
- to work on the promotion and implementation of the Call to Action for de-institutionalisation of children under three years of age; and
- to contribute to the process of eliminating large scale institutions in line with the United Nations Guidelines, supporting the creation of regulatory mechanisms and work methodologies to ensure quality standards and adequate alternatives for family and community living.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to the Inter-American Children's Institute and the OAS Department of International Affairs for giving us the opportunity to share some thoughts on such a major issue. We urge the States to further make efforts so that every child can grow up in violence-free family environments.