



The African Child Policy Forum



Second International Policy Conference on the African Child

Violence against Girls in Africa

(11-12 May 2006, United Nations Conference Centre, Addis Ababa)

In collaboration with

African Union UNECA UNICEF UNFPA Plan International Save the
Children Alliance Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices WHO
UNIFEM UNHCHR UNHCR IOM ILO UNESCO Human Rights Watch
Amnesty International

The African Child Policy Forum

P.O. Box 1179

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Tel: 251-11-552-8407/09/10

Fax: 251-11-551-3420

E-mail: conferences@africanchildforum.org

Website: www.africanchildforum.org/ipc/

Background

The international community now acknowledges that violence against children is a serious problem and cause of concern. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), as many as 40 million children under the age of 15 are victims of violence every year. Some four years ago, in its resolution 56/138, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, upon the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, requested the Secretary-General to conduct an in-depth study on the issue of violence against children. The Secretary-General thus appointed in February 2003 an independent expert, Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, to direct the study in collaboration with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WHO. This report will be based on available evidence, information and a series of regional consultations.

The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) is organising a conference on *Violence against Girls in Africa* to complement and enrich this process. This conference will add the voices—particularly, though not exclusively—of African women, women activists and leaders to stop violence against girls in Africa. These voices will be heard through a number of channels, including this major Pan-African conference on violence against girls in Africa, where policy makers, human rights activists, African youth and prominent Africans, will be present. The conference will be informed by a conference report, testimonials, dialogue among the various stakeholders and a special forum for children and youth. A poll-based report on young African women's experiences of violence against them will be produced before the conference. The outcome of the conference will be a declaration which will be submitted to the UN General Assembly and used as a vehicle for campaigning with African governments to develop effective policies and programmes against violence against girls.

The Context

Violence—physical, psychological and sexual—is an especially pernicious problem in Africa. Girls are particularly vulnerable because of physical differences, the influence of traditional values, and tolerance of domestic violence directed at them. African girls are victims of early marriage and female genital cutting, practices commonly found throughout many parts of Africa.

Early marriage puts African girls at risk of contracting the HIV virus, since most husbands are older and sexually experienced. According to the *Botswana Human Development Report 2000*, girls under the age of 14 are twice as likely as boys to contract HIV, and three times more likely when they are between 15-29 years old. African girls also contract HIV as a consequence of rape, exploitation and trafficking. In fact, HIV/AIDS is not only a consequence of violence against girls in Africa, but also a cause. In many instances, the stigmatisation of HIV/AIDS causes others to carry out physical and psychological violence against HIV/AIDS sufferers because of their illness.

African girls are further subjected to violence in times of conflict since sexual violence against women and girls is increasingly being used as a weapon of war. In Sudan's Darfur region, for example, many women and girls are raped, abducted and forced into sexual slavery by the Junjaweed militias. Girls in the conflict-ridden Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), according to Amnesty International's 2005 report, also suffer from sexual violence.

The violence experienced by African girls in conflict situations is a manifestation of the discrimination and inequality they experience in peace times—at home, in schools and in the community. For example, a March 2001 Human Rights Watch report disclosed the widespread practice of rape, assault and sexual harassment of girls by male students and teachers in South Africa. Various other reports note that girls in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Zambia commonly drop out of school to avoid harassment by male students and teachers.

The conference will focus on violence against girls in Africa in the three settings that are the principal areas of concern in the Pinheiro report, namely children in:

- the family
- school
- the community

Given that child-to-child violence is prevalent at school, in the community and at home, the conference will give special attention to *child-to-child violence*. In addition, in view of the fact that some problems are specific to Africa, the conference will complement the scope of the Pinheiro report by covering settings characterised by extreme forms of violence common to Africa, such as in:

- the workplace
- conflict and crisis situations
- situations of exploitation and trafficking

Since women and girls in Africa are the principal victims, they should be on the vanguard in the fight against all forms of violence, and those directed against girls in particular. Hence, this conference aims at involving women, women activists, women leaders and adolescent girls in the ongoing consideration of violence against them. It will add their voices to the process, to the final outcome and, more significantly, to the follow-up to the debate on violence against children that will take place in New York in 2006, during the 61st ordinary session of the UN General Assembly.

Finally, this conference is envisaged to be held in conjunction with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child to ensure synergy with the work and deliberations of the committee.

Objectives

The overall objective of the conference is to contribute to the ongoing international effort to effect attitudinal and policy changes towards violence against girls in Africa. The immediate specific objectives are to:

- provide a platform for like-minded organisations to work together and initiate an Africa-wide movement against all forms of violence against girls in Africa
- ensure that African views and positions, especially regarding girls, are reflected in actions and resolutions taken by the African Union (AU) and the UN in respect to violence against children
- initiate dialogue and formulate actions to be taken by various stakeholders, particularly governments, to address the issue of violence against girls in Africa.

Outputs

Outputs will include:

- a conference report on violence against girls in Africa
- a declaration against violence for submission to the UN General Assembly and the AU
- conference proceedings

Participants

Participants will include:

- leaders and representatives of child rights organisations
- leaders and representatives of women's organisations
- members of the Pan-African Parliament and national parliaments
- African policy makers
- the AU, the UN and concerned UN agencies
- African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- members of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Since men are the principal offenders of certain types of violence against girls, namely sexual violence, the conference will try to include as many men as possible. It will focus on the role of men in their capacity as protectors of girls in Africa rather than the perpetrators of violence against them.

Conference Format

The conference will take place in the framework of the *International Policy Conference on the African Child*, a biennial event organised by the ACPF. The conference rationale is to provide a forum for dialogue among child rights activists, policy makers and experts. The first conference was held in May 2004 in Addis Ababa on the theme *The African Child and the Family*. This second conference will appropriately focus on violence against girls in Africa, as violence against children is the subject of the special report by the UN Secretary-General and a serious problem in Africa.

Prior to the conference, the ACPF will conduct polls in six countries across Africa in order to document the personal experiences of violence against girls. The polls will result in a report that will be shared with conference participants.

The conference is expected to culminate in the adoption of a declaration to stop violence against girls in Africa. This declaration will be directed at the UN General Assembly, the AU and African governments. It will focus on the way forward and will thus complement and look beyond the Pinheiro report.

The conference programme will include plenary sessions and panel discussions.

There will be meetings of participants and representatives of child rights, women's and human rights organisations both before and after the Conference.

Child Participation

Children and youth groups will be given the opportunity to participate in the conference and in the process leading up to the event. They will present and share their experiences and voice their opinions throughout the conference. Representatives of the African Youth Forum and various children's parliaments will be encouraged to participate.

Partners

The ACPF will organise this conference in partnership with Plan International, one of the world's leading child rights and development organisations.

Both organisations will want to involve as many potential allies as possible in this very important event. Organisations that have expressed an interest in or are invited to participate include the office of the UN Secretary General dealing with the study on violence against children, the AU, UNECA, UNICEF, UNFPA, Save the Children Alliance, the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting Women's and Children's Health, the Pan-African Parliament, UNHCHR, UNHCR, UNESCO, ILO, IOM, WHO, UNIFEM, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Action Aid, Oxfam, Care, World Vision, ISPCAN and CCF.

Venue and date

The conference will take place from 11 – 12 May, 2006 at the African Union or the United Nations Conference Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. A meeting of child rights', women's and human rights' organisations will also take place on 13 May, following the conference.