



**United Nations Secretary-General's
Study on Violence Against Children**

Statement by the
Independent Expert, Mr Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro,
to the: "Yokohama review for Europe and Central Asia - Combating
sexual exploitation of children"

Ljubljana, Slovenia

08 July 2005

Good Morning,

I am extremely pleased to be here with you today as you meet to take another step along the path that you have been treading since 1996 to combat the sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

As you know, just yesterday we concluded the Europe/Central Asian regional consultation contributing to the United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children. In many ways, the process that has been put in place to develop the Study is a race against time and we are still only on the starting blocks. It is a race not in the sense that we are competing for a medal or glory, but because we have a goal that we must reach as fast and as efficiently as we can. That goal is to put an end to violence against children, whatever form it may take.

You, on the other hand, are here meeting for the third time as a region to review the progress you have made in efforts to end sexual violence against children, and to plan the next steps. You are already over the first hurdle and getting closer to the finishing line, although at times it must seem as if the course is getting longer and the end further and further away! But nine years after the first World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in 1996, you have shown that you have the energy and the determination to stay the course and not retire in defeat.

The fact that we have the two regional meetings back-to-back this week is not an accident or a matter of simple convenience. There are obvious links between sexual violence against children and violence more generally that go beyond the rights of children and our efforts to fulfil our commitments to them.

It is clear that the Study on Violence against Children can learn from your work on sexual violence in two particularly important ways:

First, since 1996 you have amassed a wealth of experience that can feed into the Study and help us to develop recommendations for accelerating efforts to combat sexual violence against children – whether that be abuse in the family or by people known to children, or exploitation by those who consider that sex with a child is just another way to satisfy what they see as adult needs or a right to pleasure.

In this region, where the sexual exploitation of children first hit world headlines, you have acquired a growing body of knowledge, data and understanding, and this is of course of inestimable value to all those who work for children, wherever they are.

Governments in this region have been in the forefront of legal revision to take into account the rights of children to be protected from sexual abuse and exploitation, including trafficking. Law enforcement efforts have given examples – especially in cross-border cooperation -- that are being shared throughout the world. Individual countries' police forces regularly exchange expertise and personnel, and bodies such as Europol take individual country experience and use it for regional impact.

NGOs in this region continue to work on the ground, alongside children and young people, to find new ways to protect children from sexual violence and support those who have fallen victim to it. This region has provided some exceptional examples of

how organisations can also work across national borders – just as the perpetrators of sexual violence often do – so that the children of Europe and Central Asia do not fall through the cracks that sometimes open up between national efforts. The methodologies, training programmes, guidelines and other tools that you have developed have relevance not only in this region and beyond but also in our efforts to confront other forms of violence.

There is a second way that the Study on Violence can look to your work and learn. You have begun a process that, almost a decade after the first World Congress, is still dynamic and real.

You have met three times at regional level and each time you have made visible progress: from a simple meeting to exchange information in Strasbourg in 1996, to a forum for sharing lessons and drafting a regional action plan in Budapest in 2001, to this meeting focused around a pragmatic tool that you have developed to help you to measure progress, share good practice and identify the challenges still to be met.

I know that at the end of this meeting you plan to adopt an accelerated agenda for action that will ensure that you continue to move forward with realistic and reachable goals.

The Study can learn much from this empowering and energetic process. We have to stay focused on action, but action that makes a real difference to children`s lives. And for that to happen, we must remember to continually talk to children, let them help us to understand better the world they live in – which is so different from the world in which *we* were children – and advise us on what we should do to fulfil our promises to them.

The first World Congress in 1996 was held in the wake of terrible events in Europe that also brought the problem of sexual violence against children to the attention of the whole world. The death of two little girls in Belgium focused everyone`s attention on this particularly horrendous form of violence – the violence that eats away at the heart of childhood, damaging a child`s sense of self-worth, making them question their relationships with others, and that has lasting repercussions into adulthood and family life.

We knew then that we could not let such violence continue. Hard as it is, we have to go on looking for ways to end sexual violence against children and indeed all the other forms of violence that show all too clearly that we are letting our children down.

I look forward to hearing the results of your meeting and I thank you all for your work here this week and every day.