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

Statement by the

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to the East Asia and Pacific Regional Consultation for the

United Nations Secretary-General' s Study on Violence against Children

Bangkok, 14 June 2005

Excellencies, colleagues from the United Nations system, representatives from the civil society, ladies, gentlemen and young people.

The East Asia and Pacific Regional Consultation on Violence against Children is the sixth regional meeting that is being held by the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children between March and July this year. These consultations are being held all over the world and are organized with the support of UNICEF, in coordination with the OHCHR, WHO and other local partners.

Firstly, I must acknowledge the commitment the Government of Thailand has shown by generously inaugurating this meeting and through intensively collaborating with the study. I am also happy to recognize the commitment to fight violence against children in this region, demonstrated not only through the governmental engagement, but also by this broad group of participants from NGOs, academic institutions, child welfare organizations, community groups, professional associations, practitioners, faith-based groups, industry, and young people. This diversity will allow a broad and unique dialogue that is crucial to the development of compelling and

concrete recommendations on how to respond and prevent the complex problem of violence.

I would also like to thank the Steering Committee and its members for the prolonged efforts that they have invested to ensure that this Consultation will be a success.

I also must acknowledge the engagement of national governments in promoting national consultations. About one month ago, I participated in the Chinese National Consultation whose excellent outcomes I am sure that are going to be shared here. I am also thankful for the efforts of governments in the region in promoting national processes which support this Regional Consultation.

The meaningful participation of children in forums as this one is also very important to understanding the issues from their unique points of view. Many organizations have carefully prepared the youth delegates for this meeting, and we appreciate their efforts. Their inputs and those of the youth delegates with us today, will provide us with insight and fresh perspectives in the fight against and prevention of violence against children.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Even if the vast majority of the world publicly disapproves of violence against children, violence remains too common and yet, too hidden. It is present in every country, frequently invisible and cutting across boundaries of culture, class, education, income, ethnic origin and age. At the same time, every society – no matter the cultural, economic or social background - can and must stop violence against children.

The massive ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by 192 States (out of the 194) is a landmark for recognition of Human Rights at the international level and clearly reflects the commitment of those States to respect and promote the positive development and protection of children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has had a definite impact on the situation of children around the world, by enhancing mechanisms for their protection and respecting their best interests.

The East Asia and Pacific region has shown progress in responding to and preventing violence in the various settings that it occurs. Comprehensive

child protection laws have been developed in certain countries and a Juvenile Courts Act has been enacted in Papua New Guinea. In addition, NGOs, UN Agencies and governments are collaborating for the development of appropriate Juvenile Justice Legislation in seven countries. In the Lao PDR a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the Ministry of Justice and Save the Children UK.

Inter-governmental Memorandum's of Understanding on Cross Border trafficking have been signed by Thailand and Cambodia and by China and Vietnam. Also, and in addition to commitments made during the 7th Ministerial Consultation cited by Ms. Anupama Rao Singh, the Bali Consensus of the 6th Ministerial Consultation on Children identifies the combating of trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children as one of four key priorities. This priority was re-asserted by the Siem Reap Angkor Declaration that emanated from the 7th Ministerial Consultation on Children.

“Children are not mini human beings with mini human rights. As long as adults continue to regard children as mini-human beings, violence against

*children will persist*¹”. Every boy and girl, as any human being, must have their rights completely respected to develop with dignity. Any form of violence can only undermine their development.

As you are probably aware, in 2000 and 2001, the Committee on the Rights of the Child devoted two days of general discussion to the theme of violence against children, and as a result of those discussions, recommended that the Secretary-General be requested, through the General Assembly, to conduct an in-depth international study on violence against children. In February 2003, I had the honour to be appointed to take on this challenging role to lead this global study. A coordinating group formed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF and WHO was also established to support the endeavour.

The UN Study on Violence against Children was conceived not only to gather information, breaking down the walls of silence that frequently surround the problem of violence against children, but also to build feasible recommendations on how to address and prevent the occurrence of violence

¹ de Boer-Buquicchio, Maud, Lecture: “JUSTICE FOR EUROPE’ S CHILDREN”; Council of Europe, December 2003.

against children based on experience in different areas of the world. Breaking the silence does not mean merely compiling shocking stories, but requires continuous efforts to understand the root causes of violence, the factors that allow it to occur frequently and, most importantly, the effective ways to adequately prevent and respond to this violence, where it occurs. We can't wait to see violence occurring to act, many successful initiatives have already showed that much violence is absolutely preventable.

As described in the concept paper prepared subsequent to my appointment, the study will approach the various types of violence against children by concentrating on the different settings where it may occur. It will pay special attention to violence in homes and within the family, in the community, in schools, in care and residential institutions, in detention facilities and prisons and in the administration of justice.

The responses to the Questionnaire for Governments prepared especially for the study are an important source of information: to date I have received the impressive number of 97 responses. I am especially thankful to say that Australia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand,

Republic of Korea, Singapore and Tonga already answered the questionnaire, with detailed and useful information exemplifying legislation and policy frameworks to counter violence against children.

While the questionnaire is aimed at governments, a separate call for public submissions has been made to encourage experts, civil society organizations and other institutions to provide us with additional information on specific aspects of violence against children. The Study Secretariat has extended its call for public submissions, and I urge you to take advantage of this opportunity before 30 June.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Significant obstacles to the elimination on violence against children persist in the East Asia and Pacific region. Among these obstacles is the limited knowledge about the scope of the problem. This inadequate acknowledgement not only limits the assessment of the current situation and of the impact of policies developed aiming the prevention and protection of children, but compromises their own protection as most of the violations may remain invisible.

Data systems in this region need to be overhauled. Mandatory reporting is not as widely practiced as it could be; data collection is often fragmented and lacks overarching coordinating frameworks. Efforts to track regional trends in relation to violence against children are at best in their infancy.

Other problems that impede progress in East Asia and the Pacific include problems with border conflicts and the impact that these conflicts have on children; specific issues relating to violence against refugees and other stateless/displaced people; and the problem of violence against ethnic minorities who are also being denied many other rights to development and participation – in themselves manifestations of violence.

All violence caused to a child will reflect in the development of this human being with consequences to that child and the society as a whole. Allowing physical and psychological chastisement of a child in their homes and in our schools or accepting the use of degrading treatments against adolescents in conflict with the law by state agents are examples of clear violations of human rights that must be combated by all available means.

Of course, when I am speaking about combating the various forms of violence, I am not speaking about merely criminalizing eventual perpetrators, but I am talking about developing initiatives to change the hearts and minds of society and prevent those events to happen. For example, it is important to promote ways to deal with child discipline excluding physical chastisement. It is also crucial to develop comprehensive strategies to tackle the root causes that may be associated with violence such as discriminative patterns and economic deprivation.

In all countries of the world it is difficult to discuss the sensitive and emotional issues of violence against children. The preparation of a truly global picture of violence against children which seeks to propose effective and clear recommendations requires the support and active participation of a vast number of networks, especially those working in the field, directly with children, and children themselves. It is also essential to establish solid links with key actors for change, who can follow up the recommendations of the report.

To have such a representative group from the East Asia and Pacific region is a very impressive achievement. As I said, we are here to learn from each

other about what works to counter violence, why it works, and how it works – and will eventually share and amplify this knowledge within the global community. We need to identify what we can do, collectively, to strengthen our efforts to reduce violence against children in East Asia and Pacific; to create action priorities to guide our work and to collectively identify and pursue important gaps and opportunities.

I praise the involvement of Governments, civil society organizations and young people in promoting an open discussion on this delicate topic and I am confident that this continuous engagement in the development of concrete and successful responses to violence will be a significant contribution to protecting the children of the entire world. The study on violence against children and this consultation are going to be important steps in this direction.

Thank you.