

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 52nd SESSION

Interactive dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children

16 March 2023

In her opening statement, **the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid** stressed that Children's vulnerability to violence continues to be exacerbated worldwide by multiple and overlapping crises, including increasing poverty, food insecurity, social and economic inequalities, conflict, and the climate crisis. The report focused on the critical and urgent need to ensure a safe, inclusive and empowering digital environment for children. The urgency of doing so is underlined by the fact that at least one in three internet users is under 18 and that children are connecting in ever greater numbers and at younger ages. But the international community must not forget the digital divide, which affects millions of children worldwide.

The Special Representative shared three key messages: *first*, risks of harm to children in the digital environment are emerging quickly and spreading rapidly. The ongoing development of new technologies and the increasing interactivity of online content, social networking, video sharing and instant messaging, have increased the risks for children to be exposed to or become victims of violence. These risks include, among others, cyberbullying; online sexual exploitation and abuse; exposure to violent and sexual content; promotion of suicide and self-harm; radicalization and hate speech; fake news; trafficking and smuggling; recruitment into criminal, armed, or violent extremist groups; fraud and identity theft. The *second* message she stated considered proactive and sustained prevention as the priority. This means ensuring sound legislation including criminal law that appropriately addresses all forms of online violence and crimes against children. *Finally*, she affirmed that children should be part of the solution. The digital world has opened the door to far greater involvement by children in every aspect of the fight against online violence. Children themselves report that the digital environment is central to their lives and has given them crucial opportunities for their voices to be heard in matters that affect them.

Interactive dialogue

63 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. **The majority of countries** shared their experiences, best practices and legislations and national plans to counter the risks of violence and protect children's rights online and offline. In particular, **the EU** reported actions to combat violence against children and address children's mental health. These actions aim to prevent cyberbullying, facilitate the exchange of best practices in mental health, and promote integrated child protection systems that put children at the center. The **U.S.** affirmed that establishing safe digital spaces, for children and youth, is integral to their economic and societal development. The international community must meaningfully involve children and youth in the conversation around online safety challenges and uplift their solutions while ensuring internet freedom and protecting fundamental freedoms for people of all ages. **Russia Federation** regretted the Special Representative's idea of using children as agents of positive change, which implies the participation of children in decision-making processes, including at international platforms. It also urged Ms. N. M'jid to stop trying to create a special protection regime for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders and queer+ children. Caution should be exercised in referring to documents containing private expert opinions, such as general comment No. 25 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. **Ukraine** reported the physical and sexual violence faced by Ukrainian children in these years of Russian aggression.

NGOs commend the Special Representative for highlighting that preventing and ending the deprivation of liberty of children are both urgent and possible; as well as, reiterating the importance of protecting children from abuse, harm and neglect, and the various services and resources available to help protect the needs of the child. Parents can uniquely place to mitigate the negative impact of digital technologies on children. **Conselho Indigenista Missionário** stressed the importance to consider violence against indigenous children in the context of lack of access to their traditional territories.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (63 country delegations):

European Union, Iceland (on behalf of the North and Baltic countries), Tunisia, Sovereign Order of Malta, Israel, Sierra Leone, Qatar, U.S., Belgium, China, Luxemburg, Slovenia, Indonesia, India, Russia Federation, Morocco, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Iraq, Togo, Costa Rica, Armenia, Egypt, Austria, Malaysia, South Africa, Maldives, South Sudan, Kazakhstan, Holy See, UK, Jamaica, Georgia, Senegal, Algeria, Malawi, Montenegro, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Thailand, Libya, Botswana, Australia, Azerbaijan, Benin, Italy, Malta, Panama, Kenya, Bulgaria, Cuba, Ireland, Ukraine, Romania, Brazil, Albania, Islamic Republic of Iran, Nigeria, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Hungary, United Arab Emirates, Cambodia, France.

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (10):

Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Edmund Rice International Limited, International Catholic Child Bureau, VIVAT International, World Muslim Congress, Conselho Indigenista Missionário CIMI, Defence for Children International, International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education (OIDEL), International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education and Development (VIDES), Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia.

International organizations (1): UNICEF

To watch the full meeting refer to [UN WEB TV](#).