



Parliamentarians from Latin America adopt strategies to eliminate violence against children

San Jose, Cost Rica, 28 August 2009 – More than 30 parliamentarians from 14 countries in Latin America convened this week in San José to address the urgent need to prevent and stop violence against children.

The Latin America and the Caribbean region ranks as one of the most violent in the world and children and adolescents are not spared. Each year, 40 million children in Latin America and the Caribbean suffer severe abuse, including abandonment, and 80,000 children under 18 die from family abuse. Only nine per cent of children in the region live under the protection of laws banning corporal punishment in the home. And surveys in 16 countries conclude that a high percentage of adults consider maltreatment of children, including corporal punishment, a normal means to impose discipline.

Addressing the parliamentary meeting - organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UNICEF, with support from the Costa Rican National Assembly - the President of the Assembly, Mr. Francisco Antonio Pacheco Fernández called on the participants to place the issue of protection of children from violence at the heart of the domestic political debate and the legislative agenda. “As opinion leaders you can help change the belief that violence against children is acceptable.”

IPU Secretary General Anders B. Johnsson noted that “we have to make good use of our capacity to legislate and hold government and public authorities to account. We can and must make sure that our societies have effective laws and functioning institutions in place so that every child can enjoy an environment that is free of violence.”

In the words of the Speaker of Bolivia’s National Assembly Edmundo Novillo, “parliamentarians must take the initiative of creating laws and allocating resources that eliminate violence and fulfil all children’s rights. We have to invest in a future that is more fair and just.”

Parliamentarians focused on the many actions they can take to prevent and eliminate violence against children, including:

- Adopting legislation that prohibits all forms of violence against children including corporal punishment in the home, and the promotion of protection measures within the judicial system that prevent the re-victimization of children.
- Allocating resources to violence prevention and the creation of protective environments for children.
- Improving monitoring and reporting mechanisms so that laws and budgets for the prevention of violence against children are properly implemented.
- Working with the media to generate a public discussion on the topic and to disseminate information.
- Interacting directly with children and enabling their participation in the legislative process.
- Ensuring that national parliaments participate in the follow-up and implementation of recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Secretary-General’s global study on violence against children.



- Strengthening partnerships with all stakeholders to prevent violence against children, including civil society, international organizations and the private sector.

Parliamentarians visited a UNICEF-supported Child Friendly Counties programme that targets children who live in vulnerable situations and often are victims of violence. They saw firsthand how sports and recreation activities involving children and community police in two of the most violent cities in Costa Rica can help to prevent violence.

“The best practices of violence prevention against children are the ones in which children participate. We must learn to listen to them and involve them,” said Seija Toro, UNICEF Representative in Costa Rica

About IPU:

IPU is the world organization of parliaments. The IPU is the international organization that brings together the representatives of parliaments. The IPU is the focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue and works for peace and cooperation among peoples with a view to strengthening representative institutions. The IPU assists parliaments to legislate and hold governments to account on major issues requiring political and legislative action. The Organization works in close partnership with the United Nations and acts in partnership with UNICEF on child rights issues. The IPU is funded by its Member Parliaments and through voluntary contributions of foundations, international organizations and governments.

About UNICEF:

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world’s largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, safe water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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