Statement by the UN Special Rapporteur on sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children on the

World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence (18 November 2024)

Ms. Mama Fatima Singhateh

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Special Rapporteur stresses on the importance of child participation in the prevention of childhood sexual violence

Geneva (18 November 2024) – In commemorating the World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence today, Mama Fatima Singhateh, Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, stressed the importance of ensuring child participation in prevention, protection, and rehabilitation efforts and announced her first Youth Advisor.

"According to the most recent data, 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 7 boys globally face some form of sexual violence before their 18th birthday," Singhateh said.

Children are exposed to risks of sexual abuse in places where they should feel safe—in their homes, schools, playgrounds, and other trusted environments. These are spaces where children seek guidance, friendship, and personal growth, yet they are often vulnerable to abuse by individuals they should trust. This is compounded also by the risks that exist in the digital environment.

Today, as the digital environment becomes ever more omnipresent and online connectivity rates are on the rise across the globe, sexual violence against children is increasingly committed through or facilitated by existing and emerging information and communication technologies. A recent study estimated that approximately 302 million children worldwide have been victims of online sexual exploitation and abuse in the past year.

Children and adolescents should therefore be at the centre of all initiatives and measures relating to the prevention and protection from sexual abuse and exploitation and support for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

“The active and meaningful involvement of children and adolescents in the design and implementation of prevention and protection strategies can increase the relevance and sustainability of such strategies, ensuring that they respond to children’s needs and serve their best interests. It also empowers children to be agents of their own lives and provide them with the means to protect themselves and their peers,” Singhateh highlighted.

To provide effective and meaningful justice, support and rehabilitation to child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, services should be freely available and accessible for all children, taking into account their age, sex, gender, level of maturity and the nature of the trauma they have suffered. “We need to consider them as agents of change and focus rehabilitation services not only on psychosocial support but also invest in empowering them with adequate education, life skills and vocational skills,” Singhateh said.

“When it comes to the digital environment, we need to hear the voices, ideas and experiences of children – who are digital natives themselves – on harmful behaviours online and ways to report and prevent them, as well as their proposals, especially on the design, deployment and operation of technological products and services,” the expert emphasized.

In an effort to engage more children and young people in her work, the Special Rapporteur launched the 1st Youth Human Rights Challenge where she invited youths between the age of 18 to 25 to produce digital content on: “***Gen Z’s take on technology-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation*****".**

“I am pleased to announce that after careful consideration, I have selected Ms. Anjali Vurden from Mauritius as my first Youth Advisor. Ms. Vurden will play a vital role in campaigning and advocating for the prevention of the different manifestations of sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, mainly on social media and among children and adolescents,” Singhateh announced.

The Youth Advisor is a remote, non-remunerative and non-renewable 12-month role to promote the work of the mandate towards mainstreaming and inclusion of young people.

“I look forward to seeing Ms. Vurden thrive in this new role as well as learn from and work with her to contribute to the mission of the mandate to prevent and eradicate the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children around the globe.”

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