15th Anniversary of the Lanzarote Convention

Achievements, challenges and the way forward to prevent and protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse

Way forward: Preventing and protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse

Linking the Lanzarote Convention with the wider international context: UNSDGs, Ministerial Conference on Violence against Children in Bogotá.

Intervention by Ms. Mama Fatima Singhateh, UN Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children

30th June-1st July 2025 Valetta Malta.

Linking the Lanzarote Convention to the broader international context involves the understanding of how it aligns with global initiatives aimed at preventing and addressing child sexual exploitation and abuse. As we reflect on our ongoing commitment to safeguarding children from sexual exploitation and abuse, the 15th Anniversary of the Lanzarote Convention represents a significant milestone in our collective efforts. It's impact however lies in how it connects with broader international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, its optional protocol on the sale of children and the Sustainable Development Goals.

My intervention today will touch on how my mandate and the recommendations I make in my annual reports align with the principles of the Lanzarote Convention and in the context of the UNCRC, its optional protocol on the sale of children and the UNSDGs. I would first like to speak briefly about my mandate. I was appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children by the Human Rights Council in March 2020. I am mandated to report annually to the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly, conduct two country visits per annum and regularly advocate for the protection of children globally from sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. My work also includes active collaboration with member states, civil society organisations, children and other stakeholders. You will recall that the name of my mandate until recently was sale and sexual exploitation of children, child prostitution and child

pornography. In 2023 I successfully advocated, through the leadership and support of the sponsors of my mandate (the EU delegation and Uruguay on behalf of GRULAC) for the change of the name of my mandate to sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children which is more child friendly and aligns with the mission of the mandate.

I have over the past five years presented several reports to the UNGA and HRC. Consequently, in 2022 I presented to the UNGA, a thematic report on addressing the vulnerabilities of children to sale and sexual exploitation within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (*https://docs.un.org/en/A/77/140*). Globally, there are certain groups of children who may be at greatest risk of falling victim to sale, sexual exploitation and abuse owing to inequalities exacerbated by situations and factors such as multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including on the basis of gender, disability, race, ethnicity or identity. In my report I highlighted that the 2030 Agenda serves as a blueprint for the effective implementation of many existing international legal instruments. To measure the achievement of the Goals, the indicators can also be used to measure compliance with international law where intersections exist between the targets and international legal obligations. The 2030 Agenda is therefore a crucial milestone for eliminating and eradicating the sale and sexual exploitation of children. In this context the report sought to identify children who, by virtue of their circumstances, are most at risk or vulnerable to sale and

sexual exploitation under targets 5.3, 8.7 and 16.2 of the SDGs, and have provided examples of good practices on how their vulnerability and protection needs can be mitigated in the context of the situational status of the family, the digital space and institutional settings.

I would like to recall that SDG 5 inter alia requires states to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, including trafficking, sexual and other types of exploitation; SDG 8 requires states to eliminate worst forms of child labour, which includes the sale and/or the sexual abuse of a child through prostitution or for other illicit activities, and SDG 16 requires States to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. These Goals complement many provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child including Articles 19, 34, 35, 36, and 37 together with relevant provisions of its Optional Protocol on the sale of children. They can also be easily linked to some of the offences under Articles 18 to 23 of the Lanzarote Convention.

Therefore, many of the recommendations in my report are equally relevant to the signatories of the Lanzarote Convention and support the work of the Committee in terms of its monitoring role and identifying good practices. For example I emphasized the importance of alleviating poverty and financial stressors for families in need through poverty reduction strategies, reallocation of resources, distribution of support schemes for caregivers supporting children with disabilities, elimination of language barriers to access information and services,

and access to health care services for families and children in street settings, which are all essential in meeting the needs of victims or children at risk of sexual exploitation.

Additionally, my report to the Human Rights Council in 2023 on Reparation for child victims and survivors of sale and sexual exploitation (*https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/52/31*), examine the scope and importance of reparation for children who have been affected by sale, sexual abuse and exploitation, and made recommendations regarding measures that can be adopted in accordance with international standards, including the means to safeguard reparation that is effective, adequate and prompt to ensure meaningful redress.

While it may not be possible to return victims to their previous condition before the harm was suffered, reparation is nevertheless a crucial component of meaningful remedy and recovery for child victims and survivors of sale and sexual exploitation. Some of the recommendations made in the report include; enacting comprehensive legislation on reparation for child victims and survivors of sale and sexual exploitation, with accountability measures; develop survivor-centred co-creation processes to ensure that the views of child victims and survivors are heard and that their participation is amplified in the process of reparation programmes and procedures, including in their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; protect the confidentiality, privacy and personal information of children who are or have been involved in

administrative or judicial proceedings; and eliminate impediments such as statutes of limitation, provide legal support to victims in the course of judicial proceedings; ensure and finance urgent interim reparation, including free medical care and psychological, educational, financial, legal and housing support, including other forms of assistance and reparation as applicable, to all child victims and survivors, without discrimination.

These recommendations provide for measures that will ensure holistic prevention strategies, as well as robust protection mechanisms and adequate support services for child victims and survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation in line with Article 39 of the CRC and Articles 8 and 9 of the OPSC, which are complemented by the provisions under Chapter IV, Articles 33,35, and 36 of the Lanzarote Convention.

Looking forward, protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse must be marked by holistic prevention strategies, civil society engagement, education, awareness campaigns and robust protection mechanisms specialized training, victim support services, and effective law enforcement. However, in order to fully integrate the Lanzarote Convention into the broader international landscape particularly within UN contexts, strategic actions would be required to embed it into the work of UN Treaty Bodies, especially the Committee on the Rights of the Child. For instance, in developing General Comments which are authoritative interpretations of the UNCRC and guidance on how to implement its provisions,

the CRC Committee can also draw inspiration from regional conventions such as the Lanzarote Convention and recommendations from its Committee. The integration of the Lanzarote Convention can also be done through strengthening the already existing collaboration between my mandate and the Lanzarote Committee. For example, when I go on country visits especially to State Parties of the Convention, the Lanzarote Committee's report provides useful information for my assessment of the State's efforts in light of international standards. Likewise, my report from the said country visits could also shed some light on efforts on the ground and contribute to the Committee's monitoring mandate.

Raising awareness on the provisions of the Lanzarote Convention can also enhance its visibility within the UN and amongst its agencies. Offering training and technical assistance packages to child protection professionals within UN field offices, national authorities, NGOs and other stakeholders on the Lanzarote Convention standards, and guidelines and recommendations issued by the Lanzarote Committee can not only improve the visibility of the Convention but also ensure it is effectively integrated into the broader international child protection landscape.

Likewise, the recent Ministerial Conference on Violence Against Children in Bogotá highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive national strategies and international collaboration to reduce incidences of violence against children including sexual exploitation. The Lanzarote Convention aligns with and

supports this effort through its provisions and provides a legal framework for many of the commitments made in Bogotá. The provisions of the Convention can be leveraged by States to develop comprehensive national frameworks and strategies to reduce incidences of sexual violences and exploitation against children. Through the monitoring mechanism of the Lanzarote Committee, the Convention ensures a monitoring and accountability process which helps member states report and assess progress, thereby complementing global tracking efforts. Finally, translating the pledges from Bogotá into action will require a coordinated approach and collaboration. The Lanzarote Committee is well-placed to foster further exchange of good practices and encourage the detection of difficulties, thereby improving state capacity to prevent and combat child sexual exploitation.

Linking the Lanzarote Convention to the broader international context to prevent and protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, is not a difficult task but it will require the strengthening of existing collaboration, fostering multilateral cooperation and implementing innovative strategies that effectively prevent and protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse.

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