

December 23, 2010

DPI/NGO Briefing

“May I ask a Question, Madame Special Representative
Of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children?”

Thursday, December 16, 2010, 10:15AM - 12:15PM

1. Background Information:

Today’s Briefing looked at the work of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on violence against children. This office was created in May, 2009 in fulfillment of one of twelve recommendations of a United Nations Study on Violence Against Children concluded in 2006. The study conducted by Brazilian diplomat and former United Nations Reporter Paulo Sergio on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

He found that millions of children throughout the world live with the devastating effects of violence, including injuries, disabilities, life-long emotional and psychological effects, sometimes even death. The study recommended that governments act to establish a Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (SRSG).

The role of the SRSG would be to act as a high-profile global advocate to promote the prevention and elimination of all violence against children. On May 1, 2009 Ms. Marta Santos, a national of Portugal, was appointed as the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children. The SRSG reports directly to the Secretary-General and chairs the United Nations Inter Agency Working Group on Violence against Children. They collaborate closely with a wide range of partners within and beyond the United Nations system.

2. Moderator:

Ms. Gail Bindley-Taylor Sainte; Public Information Officer,
NGO Relations, Department of Public Information (DPI)

3. Speaker:

Ms. Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the United Nations
Secretary-General on Violence against Children

4. The Moderator, Ms. Gail Bindley-Taylor Sainte, welcomed everyone and introduced the speaker with her background. She indicated that on May 1, 2009 Ms. Pais mobilized action against all violence against children.

A video was now shown on the violence there. The video showed that biological parents had abandoned a two year old child. The video also showed the living quarters of a family that took the abandoned child in and raised her. The child had been bruised and harmed. The child’s new family did not legally adopt her because the child’s mother lived nearby.

The video also showed that there was excessive alcohol use. It also gave examples of enforcement problems authorities faced. Village elders are now working with officials to change the laws that allow physical punishment.

5. The speaker, Ms. Marta Santos Pais, brings to her United Nations position more than thirty years experience on human rights issues, engagement in the United Nations and intergovernmental issues. She has a firm commitment to the rights of the child. She is also the Director of the UNICEF Innocent Research Center in Florence, Italy. Prior to this she served as the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Vice-Chair of the coordinating Committee on Childhood Policies of the Council of Europe.

Ms. Santos Pais is a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of the International Journal of Children's Rights and a member of the Advisory Board of the International Inter-disciplinary Course on Children's Rights. She also was a member of the United Nations Drafting Group of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and of its two Optional Protocols.

She indicated that the tradition of punishing a child for bad behavior was difficult to change. She started her efforts on the issue of children's violence in September, 2009. Her key priority is addressing the issue of violence against children. She determined the agenda for this after four years study. It is difficult for a child to speak out on this violence issue. Girls and boys are very much afraid to speak out on the abuses.

The United Nations and its agencies are working on this issue. It is a Human Rights issue. This is an issue that all governments must address. Columbia University first brought up this issue in 2001 and issued a report on it in their Teachers College Reports volume 3, number one, Winter of 2001. The speaker ended her presentation with a second video of a child "That We Should Help the Child not Punish".

6. Questions/Answers (By Ms. Marta Santos Pais):

6.1 We must collaborate on this mission on the ground to change the dimensions of the children

6.2 It is critical for us to invest in prevention. We must intervene when any issue of violence arises. Alcohol is a major problem. Resources must be made available to help the child in these cases.

6.3 Part of her job is to raise funds so governments can help the child. Sometimes the problem is one of a technical issue not of money available.

6.4 Schools have a principle place in working on this issue and its solutions. We must invest in professionals in these communities for early warning of problems. Some countries have established schools without violence.

6.5 There will be a meeting next month in Europe to address this important issue with government officials.

6.6 Violence cannot be connected only with children. A child needs a positive relationship with their parents. Schools play an important role by educating the child. Family life is very important.

6.7 School management and school life plays an important role in the life of the child. We all have a role to play on this issue in arriving at a solution. We cannot implement a change unless it comes from within us.

6.8 This issue is one of both our hearts and mind sets. UNICEF is launching a study on this important issue. Some parents believe that violence is important in bringing up their children.

6.9 Last year forty-seven countries elected to stop sexual violence against children.

6.10 It is not an easy task to address this issue. Families play an important role on this important issue.

6.11 Violence has no role in bringing up a child. The family are important. They must all join hands.

6.12 The rights of the child are critical.