

NOVEMBER 2024

# CALL TO ACTION

**From Youths to Governments**

## TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM VIOLENCE

Young people worldwide call on their governments to take urgent, decisive action to safeguard children from violence.

# Introduction

Across the globe, 1 in 2 children — that's **1 billion children** — worldwide are affected by violence. This staggering statistic reveals the widespread, but mostly unspoken of, crisis faced by children in every setting: at the home, in schools, within communities, and even online. Violence against children is an issue that transcends borders and cuts across culture and socioeconomic class. The effects last a lifetime and are physical, mental, and social.

In response to this global crisis, young people are rallying together, raising their voices, and calling on their governments to take urgent, decisive action to safeguard children from violence.

We are the Youth Mobilisers who are leading the launch of the first-ever **Global Youth-Led Movement on Ending Violence Against Children**. In preparation for the **Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children** in Bogotá, Colombia, we consulted with young people between the ages of 18-29 around the world on their perspectives and experiences on childhood violence.

One of the questions we asked during these consultations was, “As a young person, what do you think governments can do to ensure that children are effectively protected from violence?”

This Call to Action reflects the collective demands of youth worldwide for their governments to fulfill their duty to protect children's right to a nurturing and safe environment. These are split into **six key areas**:

1. Safe Reporting and Specialized Listening for Children
2. Building Capacity and Responsiveness in Public Services
3. Law Enforcement and Access to Justice
4. Cultural Change and Awareness
5. Strengthening Governance and Institutions
6. Parents and Caregivers

Young people view themselves as active rights-holders and believe that protecting children should be a shared **societal responsibility**. They assert that this duty goes beyond national laws and call for governments to ratify international human rights agreements that set higher standards for protecting children.

Young people are ready to play an active role in ending violence against children, indeed in communities around the world they are already leading the way. We urge governments to listen to our Call to Action and join us in our vision for a world free from violence against children.

## 1. Safe Reporting and Specialized Listening for Children

Youth emphasize the need for accessible and confidential reporting systems where children can safely voice out their experiences. They call for specialized units staffed by trained professionals who can listen to children without causing further harm (i.e., re-victimization), and for strengthened social support systems. These networks include child-friendly protection units and platforms which can connect children directly to safety professionals and educate them — as well as their caregivers — on personal safety skills. The youth believe that empowering children through education on how to stay safe at homes, in school, and online is crucial so that they can confidently report violence and seek help when needed.

### **Recommendations from the Global Youth Consultations:**

- **We demand** the creation and improvement of **clear and accessible reporting protocols** for children and young people — including specialized units for victims of abuse — to ensure that they can be heard, respected, and report violations of their safety without fear of retaliation.
- **We reiterate** the importance of **strengthening social protection networks** to reduce the risks of violence faced by children and young people in vulnerable situations and settings.
- **We call** for the development of **educational programs** and **communication strategies** so that children and young people can learn to identify trusted adults and build the skills and confidence to act in their own defense.
- **We call** for the **democratization** of access to reporting mechanisms and support systems to improve response and support for victims of violence.
- **We call** for greater commitment towards **national initiatives that train parents, caregivers, and professionals** to teach children and adolescents personal safety skills and how to respond to violence.

*“Governments should ensure that children have **safe and confidential ways to report abuse**, through the establishment of child-friendly and protection units that help assist children who are victims of abuse.” — 18-20 year old, Zimbabwe*



## 2. Building Capacity and Responsiveness in Public Services

Youth advocate for training public service providers — those who interact directly and indirectly with children and youth — in all sectors to prepare them to prevent and address violence. Professionals must be able to recognize the signs of violence and follow the standardized protocols for reporting and referring affected children, young people, and families to respective support services. Young people emphasize the need to expand communication channels and increase the financial resources allocated to this area in national budgets.

### **Recommendations from the Global Youth Consultations:**

- **We demand** the **improvement of social protection services** for children and young people in situations of violence — such as through counseling, helplines, forensic listening, and protected listening.
- **We stress** the urgency of **comprehensive training for public service providers** who interact directly or indirectly with children and young people — such as teachers, healthcare providers, and public safety officers — so that they can effectively and efficiently handle cases of violence.
- **We recognize** the health, education, public safety, and technology **sectors as priorities** for the development of initiatives to combat violence against children.



*"Policy adherence in government educational institutions, along with awareness programs conducted by governmental and non-governmental organizations for parents and community members, can help create a safer environment."*— **24-26 year old, India**

### 3. Law Enforcement and Access to Justice

Youth recognize the need for effective laws and mechanisms to eliminate all forms of violence against children and believe governments should lead the way in making this change happen. Across both developed and developing countries, youth collectively call for the democratization (i.e., accessibility) of laws so that children and young people are able to actively engage with them on a daily basis — increasing their knowledge of their rights and what they can do to invoke them.

They also focus on the shortcomings of implementation mechanisms and highlight the severe gap they observe between formal and substantive rights. Young people frequently mention terms related to law enforcement and efficiency — stressing the need for laws to be actively upheld, with quick and fair processes (e.g., appropriate penalties) to bring perpetrators to justice. Suggestions from youth also repeatedly include imposing enough severe punishment for offenders to ensure that child protection systems are real and effective across society.

#### **Recommendations from the Global Youth Consultations:**

- **We demand** the implementation of **robust law enforcement mechanisms** that guarantee effective and swift accountability for perpetrators of violence against children and young people.
- **We emphasize** the importance of **continuous training for all justice system professionals** — including police officers, judges, and prosecutors — to ensure greater responsiveness and sensitivity to children's experiences, as well as to avoid re-victimization.
- **We advocate** for the **democratization of knowledge about legal frameworks** related to child protection — ensuring that information is transmitted in clear and age-appropriate language for children and young people to understand.

*"I believe Governments can ensure children's protection from violence by ensuring accountability and justice for perpetrators through efficient judicial processes." — 21-23 year old, Zambia*




## 4. Cultural Change and Awareness

Youth believe that government efforts to address violence against children should go beyond legal measures — they are central to promoting the cultural shifts necessary to build a society where children and young people are safe and valued. Public awareness campaigns that challenge harmful social norms and behaviors around violence, as well as create safe spaces, have the power to transform all social spheres from private relationships to public institutions. These initiatives must reach all areas accessed by children and young people — whether rural or urban — and take into account the specific needs of each population. Youth advocate that the protection and well-being of children and young people is a responsibility shared by all.

### **Recommendations from the Global Youth Consultations:**

- **We urge** governments **expand and increase funding for public programs** and initiatives aimed at child protection and safety — making them accessible to children, youth, caregivers, and communities.
- **We call** for the **promotion of community participation** in the development and implementation of child and youth protection policies, so that they are adapted to the needs of the population and territorial demands.
- **We recognize** the importance of **large-scale social awareness campaigns** helping caregivers understand the long-term effects of violence — ensuring that they are empowered to create healthier and more supportive environments for children and young people.




*“There’s a need for informing the public of what exactly is considered violence against children because there are certain cultural values/mindset that does not exactly allow people with authority or caregivers to notice that what they’re doing is abuse/neglect.” — 21-23 year old, Philippines*

## 5. Strengthening Governance and Institutions

Youth heavily stress that child protection should be prioritized across all government agendas — regardless of any political changes (e.g., party preferences). This entails a paradigm shift through consolidated laws to ensure that children's rights are safeguarded long-term and provided stability and consistency in all child protection effectors. Youth collectively call for decision-makers in all institutions to prioritize integrated, proactive approaches to ending violence against children — that adapt to social changes and ensure that policies remain relevant and effective.

### *Recommendations from the Global Youth Consultations:*

- **We advocate** that care for youth and children be established as a **state policy** and not just a government policy — as this has the power to promote progress in various areas and contribute to the country's development.
- **We demand** the implementation of **large-scale monitoring and evaluation mechanisms** to ensure that public services for young people and children are continuously improved.
- **We call** on decision-makers to be alert to the **emergence of new forms of violence** and to consider how children and young people experience these issues — particularly those arising from technological progress and climate change.
- **We demand** that states commit to more than just promoting basic rights and ensure that **all areas of public policymaking** prioritize the well-being of children and young people.
- **We reinforce** the importance of **inter-sectoral collaboration** in the adoption of restorative justice mechanisms and the prevention of extremism.




*"It is necessary to work together with families, educational institutions, bodies, and organizations to raise awareness in society that children are developing human beings who deserve and must be respected, ensuring conditions for their full development." — 21-23 year old from Brasil*

## 6. Parents and Caregivers

Youth recognize the role of parents and caregivers and the influence their care practices have on children's experiences of violence. They emphasize the need for more evidence-based programs to educate parents and caregivers on all forms of violence — specifically those that are often overlooked in some countries (due to culture and social norms) such as psychological abuse and neglect. Youth also widely acknowledge the different challenges that parents and caregivers face — including poverty, job insecurity, and mental health struggles — which contribute to their violent behaviors, and thus urge for opportunities and initiatives that improve community living conditions and social support networks.

### **Recommendations from the Global Youth Consultations:**

- **We stress** the importance of developing social protection programs that sustainably **improve the living conditions of parents and caregivers** to reduce the risks of violence for children and young people at the home.
- **We demand** that parenting programs adopt a transversal and integrative approach to care — fostering the construction of **community support networks** and the connection between families and public service providers.
- **We emphasize** the importance of structuring parental education programs with a focus on **positive parenting** and the **right to play** as essential strategies for preventing violence.



*“There's a need for **informing the public of what exactly is considered violence against children** because there are certain cultural values/mindset that does not exactly allow people with authority or caregivers to notice that what they're doing is abuse/neglect..” — 21-23 year old, Philippines*



## Moving Forward

Throughout 2024, we have been engaging with young people around the world about the urgent action they want to see on ending violence against children and the role they want to play within this mission.

We hope to establish the first-ever global network of young changemakers working to end violence against children. Building on existing research and engagement with youth groups and child-centered organizations and projects, this youth-led initiative will connect young people everywhere who want to play a role in this important work, as well as holding ministers accountable to the important pledges they will make at this first-ever Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children.

### **This will include:**

**Mobilization/Network Building:** Providing a platform for young people and youth-led organizations already working on ending violence against children (EVAC) to come together. We hope that this network can be utilised as a mapping tool that bridges young advocates with governments — further synergising grassroots, regional, national, and international efforts to end violence against children.

**Storytelling:** Leveraging the work of youth mobilisers and creative storytellers, we want to amplify young people's lived experiences through peer-to-peer communications to dismantle stigma and provide role models for young survivors. We also want to be able to communicate the work of the network and the breakthroughs in ending violence against children.

**Channelling resources and support to young leaders:** Young people need resources to do this crucial work, whether that's financial support such as funding to support the work of their organisations or the technical support to build their skills in areas including advocacy, communicating and connecting with others.

**Young people have a vital role to play in the mission to end violence against children.**

**Join us!**

**Sincerely,**

Youth Mobilisers

Global Youth-Led Movement on Ending Violence Against Children