

# Foreword

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This issue of the *South African Child Gauge* marks a very special year for children – the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Upon ratification of this international charter of children’s rights, 193 states parties have made a solemn pledge to safeguard the rights of all girls and boys, everywhere and at all times.

Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are not simply passive beneficiaries of actions, services or charity. They are subjects of rights and agents of change. Governments are required to take children seriously and to promote children’s rights as a distinct priority: in laws and policies, in budget decisions and in daily actions across all levels of administration. One key dimension of this agenda is the imperative to safeguard the right of the child to freedom from violence.

The right of the child to freedom from violence lies at the heart of the Convention. It is inherent to the human dignity of the child and it stands as a crucial indicator of how genuine the commitment of any nation is to safeguarding children’s human rights.

Violence is a human rights violation that compromises children’s rights and hinders social progress. Fear and pain continue to haunt the lives of millions of children around the world. The 2006 UN Secretary-General’s study on violence against children<sup>1</sup> represented the first attempt to document this sad reality. The study set forth 12

overarching recommendations to accelerate progress toward the prevention and elimination of violence against children, in all its forms and in all settings. To assess progress in the implementation of these recommendations, in 2013 my office conducted a global survey<sup>2</sup> which was informed by reports received from over 100 national governments.

The global survey highlights positive developments and provides strategic guidance on what needs to be done to give every child the opportunity of enjoying a childhood free from violence. Our understanding of how and why children are exposed to violence in the home, in schools, on the streets, in the workplace, in care institutions and in detention centres has deepened and strategic actions are underway in a number of countries to translate this knowledge into effective protection.

The global survey found that many governments have strengthened national implementation efforts through the adoption of public policies and legal reforms, and have launched information campaigns to rally public support and overcome social norms and attitudes condoning violence against children. Children and young people are actively joining these efforts, including through advocacy and peer education.

Despite this positive trend, progress has been too slow, too uneven and too fragmented to bring violence against boys and girls

1 Pinheiro PS (2006) *World Report on Violence against Children*. New York: UN.

2 Office of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children (2013) *Toward a World Free from Violence: Global Survey on Violence against Children*. New York: UN.

to an end. Violence remains a pervasive phenomenon that blights the life of countless children around the world and is associated with serious human, social and financial costs.

The global survey calls upon governments to develop and promote a national, child-centered, integrated, multi-disciplinary and time-bound strategy for violence prevention and children's protection there from. Explicit legal bans on all manifestations of violence against children should be enacted as a matter of urgency, accompanied by detailed measures for effective enforcement and by greater efforts to address the social acceptance of this phenomenon. Governments must work to enhance the meaningful participation of children and to ensure the social inclusion of girls and boys who are particularly vulnerable. A stronger focus should be placed on the factors that influence levels of violence and the resilience of children, their families and communities. The crucial importance of collecting and effectively using disaggregated data on violence against children should be recognised and matched with adequate support and resources. Moreover, to further advance nations' development and the protection of children's rights, violence against children should be made a priority concern in the post-2015 development agenda.

This issue of the *South African Child Gauge* supports global efforts to prevent and eliminate violence against children. It provides a sound contribution to our understanding of the challenges faced by children in South Africa and encourages action to strengthen violence prevention and response efforts and accelerate progress in the implementation of the Children's Act and with the Bill of Rights in the Constitution.

The report highlights that while much has been achieved, the violence is pervasive in South Africa, as it is around the world. It points to the extent and depth of the violence that is committed against children and, importantly, what needs to be done from a legal, policy and programmatic perspective to more effectively secure children's protection.

The *South African Child Gauge 2014* is particularly timely, as South Africa commemorates 20 years of the advent of democracy. This is a uniquely auspicious time to mark the start of an era where all boys and girls enjoy a childhood free from violence.

As Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, I warmly welcome this important report and look forward to joining hands with the South African government and its partners to ensure that children's right to freedom from violence is a reality everywhere and at all times.

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