

Keynote Speech of Children and Young People

“Most of us here today will never know what it’s like to be sexually exploited. Not until you have been lying in an alleyway with the rain and the blood dripping from your face because you have just been raped and beaten, and you’re too scared to move, because there’s no where to go and no one to help you.”

Although many of us will never know what it’s like, we are here on behalf of our children who are being sexually exploited and cannot be here today. As well as all the young people who are involved in the congress and those who weren’t given the opportunity to be here.

We have struggled long and hard to be here to make sure that the message in our hearts, and ideas in our heads can reach out to improve the lives of the many children affected across the globe.

The children and young people at this conference have echoed declarations and agendas for action that have previously been adopted by both young people and adults alike. Although these declarations have been made they have not been implemented. We feel that less energy should be focused on discussing, but rather focused on implementing these processes.

We are all part of this fight against CSEC. In rainy alley ways, private houses, offices and conferences -- we are fighting our battle.

We the children and young people suggest the following improvements, hear our voice!

We recognize the value of relevant, children-sensitive education in the fight against CSEC. We would like for there to be education for both children, their parents, and other adults (especially those who encounter/come into contact with CSEC such as teachers, lawyers, psychologists, police) on CSEC, CRC, Adolescent Sexuality and Reproductive Health, STIs, HIV/AIDS. There is a need for this education not only to provide knowledge but also challenge attitudes about these issues.

In rehabilitation and reintegration, special education for survivors of CSEC are essential to the healing process. Accessible and affordable (free to as high a level as possible) education for all children will help to combat CSEC.

Research and documentation is another important area. We need to find more information about CSEC, and to find better ways to get this information. More research should be done by governments, NGOs, especially using participatory research methods involving children and young people. We would like to see more research initiated by and carried out by children and young people. Research and other available information should be put in a database in order to better coordinate and disseminate this data. A gap in the efforts to do research is in investigating the root causes of CSEC and the perpetrators or exploiters.

Increasingly, we realize the need to address the demand factor in the problem of CSEC. Commercial sexual exploitation of children is a large business endeavour from which some government officials and politicians profit. This demand is also affected by the unequal gender relations, and although many girls are sexually exploited, we should recognize that boys are also prone to such exploitation.

Elimination of CSEC is government obligation. The state should ratify and implement relevant international instruments (e.g. ILO Convention 182). More policies and programs addressing CSEC should be developed and implemented with appropriate monitoring and evaluation at the local, national and international levels. Government should ensure that it combats corruption in law enforcement bodies and ensure that all government officials are committed and do not participate in any CSEC related activity and be open to provide information to NGOs and young people. There is a need for international judicial cooperation to deal with those who commit crimes in one country and seek refuge in another.

CRC should be the guiding principle for all policies, practices and programs related to the fight against CSEC. Priority should always be given to the best interest of the child and any discrimination is to be avoided.

We are aware that the Internet, and other forms of media are contributing to the promotion of CSEC. But print, electronic and traditional media have a big role in combating CSEC and therefore they should be used effectively. The media should provide children with the appropriate information.

Combating CSEC requires a huge amount of human and material/financial resources.

There is a need for networking and cooperation among agencies (and YP) working to combat CSEC as well as to establish monitoring mechanism at all levels with the participation of young people. We also need more expertise for appropriate services to recover and reintegrate CSEC survivors.

Aside from this, we request long term funding commitment and for the government to allocate sufficient national budget to address CSEC related activities.

In all of these recommendations and actions, we must emphasize the value of children and young people's participation. Children and young people's participation is necessary in order to get better and more sustainable action or response to CSEC. As the saying goes 'who feels it, knows it', therefore, the involvement of experiential children and young people in all levels of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation is a giant step in the right direction.

Together, we should discuss the right sense of direction of children's participation and identify and propose concrete and practical ideas for children and young people's participation in the National Agenda for Action. Adults need to listen to children. So, we children and young people recommend as follows:

- When you organize something to do with children, the organizers have to make sure that the children can participate in meaningfully.
- Make sure that children are able to participate in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of activities related to their development.
- Recognize that children have the ability to express their own opinion and take part in decision-making.
- Children should receive support from adults and fellow children.
- Provide children with a safe and enabling environment.

Besides these common issues, we need to consider many regional and cultural particularities. Because the time is limited, we would like to give as examples only some of them.

In countries like Australia, today there is a need to address the issue of drug reform. In some areas where instability and conflict take place, the problem of CSEC worsens. In other areas, the challenge of poverty and the effects of globalization are particularly important. While in other countries, priority should be given to the phenomenon of compensated dating.

Appropriate responses for recovery and reintegration should be sensitive to the specific cultural, economic, and political situation of children and young people.

IF CHILDREN'S SURVIVAL, DEVELOPMENT, PROTECTION AND PARTICIPATION RIGHTS ARE NOT ENSURED, WE CANNOT ELIMINATE CSEC.

We have fought the battle to participate, we are fighting to be heard and trying not to lose.

We demand that every child and young person be respected and treated as equal partners in this conference and all other national and international development efforts.

We wish that every participant start and finish this congress with the spirit of friendship and cooperation that is needed to combat CSEC.

We thank you for your attentive listening and interest in the development of the children and young people of the world.