



# PRESS RELEASE



United Nations Children's Fund, Regional Office for South Asia, P.O. Box 5815, Lekhnath Marg  
Kathmandu, Nepal. Telephone: (9771) 417082 Fax: (9771) 419479

## **South Asia Consultation for the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Dhaka, 4-6 November 2001**

### **South Asia Strategy Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children adopted at Dhaka consultation, Dhaka, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2001.**

The 3-day South Asia Consultation for the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children which was held in Dhaka concluded today with the adoption of a Regional Strategy which will be presented at the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) at Yokohama, Japan, 17-20 December, 2001. Participants from the Governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, including 25 children and young adults, and representatives of international agencies and non-governmental organisations attended the Consultation. All the governments with the exception of Bhutan and Maldives, had signed the Stockholm Agenda for Action in 1996 when they made commitments towards eliminating commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Regional Strategy is an expression of the commitment on the part of South Asian countries for forging a collective and concerted action for clamping down on the scourge of commercial sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children which plagues the region.

The meeting noted that deep-rooted secrecy and a pervasive silence complicate the issue of commercial sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. While the available data on the magnitude and extent of the problem are inadequate, figures indicate that it is alarmingly widespread in the region.

Children who are sexually abused are usually 13 to 18 years old, but more girls suffer and the average age appears to be falling. Commercial sexual exploitation of children and sexual abuse recognizes no borders or socio-economic barriers. However, the children of underprivileged and marginalised, religious and ethnic minorities or caste groups, those with disabilities, in institutional care, and children who work, are particularly vulnerable. Limited access to reproductive health services, life skills and education, makes children, especially adolescents, even more vulnerable. And with increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the region, sexual abuse exposes children to the deadly HIV virus as well as other sexually transmitted infections. The abuse may come from within or outside the family and is often perpetrated by someone who is trusted by the child. Abusers are usually men, but are sometimes boys and can also be women. The crimes involve many other actors outside the home but there can also be complicity or active promotion from the family, such as when children are sold for prostitution. Poverty, globalisation, social and gender discrimination, and weak legislative and judicial implementation are also important factors, although the Consultation noted that poverty cannot be used as an excuse for child sexual exploitation or abuse. Because of weak birth registration systems, children often have no official identity and proof of age, making them an easy prey to

abusers and hampering legal actions. And while children have rights to protect themselves and seek protection of adults, forums for listening to children and giving them opportunities to express their views and opinions on decisions and actions that affect them are lacking or insufficient.

The South Asia Strategy is being translated into National Plans of Action (NPA) by each government with the aim of eliminating child prostitution, trafficking of girls and boys for sexual purposes, sex tourism, and child pornography, which are the prevalent forms of child abuse in South Asian countries. Country actions will be guided by the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by every Asian country. The countries committed to apply the principle of zero tolerance against commercial sexual exploitation of children and child sexual abuse through concerted efforts at all levels - locally, nationally and regionally.

The South Asia Strategy, emanating from three days of intensive and participatory discussion and negotiation, proposes concrete measures for preventing commercial sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, as well as protecting them from it. It suggests how countries should help to rescue, recover and reintegrate affected children into their communities, processes which often involve working across borders. It also recommends ways for governments, NGOs, children's groups, the media and international organizations to work more effectively together to put a stop to commercial sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children.

The strategy acknowledges that mere commitments and plans are not enough and that achieving real results in combating commercial sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children will require additional investment of resources – financial, human and organisational. Given the urgency of the task of not allowing a single girl or boy to suffer from commercial sexual exploitation or sexual abuse, the final paragraph of the Strategy affirms that... *“Towards this goal, and in accordance with the Kathmandu Understanding of May 2001, we call upon governments to set targets and allocate specific additional resources, beyond those allocated to basic social services and other social welfare programmes, to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children and child sexual abuse. We also call upon our international development partners to help in mobilising resources required for effective actions through enhanced financial assistance.”*

For further information, please contact:

Robert Tyabji at UNICEF-ROSA, Kathmandu, Tel: (977-1) 417082 Fax: (977-1) 419479.  
Email: [rtyabji@unicef.org](mailto:rtyabji@unicef.org)

Naseem-Ur-Rehman, UNICEF Dhaka, Tel: (880-2) 9336701 Fax(880-2) 9335641  
Email: [nrehman@unicef.org](mailto:nrehman@unicef.org)