



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF
BULGARIA**

TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

“Breaking the Cycle of Violence against Girls and Boys: The Role of Parliamentarians”

A high-level event organized by UNICEF, the Permanent Mission of Bulgaria, the Permanent Mission of Panama and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

New York, 16 March 2017, 3.00 pm, UNICEF House

H.E. Mr. Georgi Panayotov, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN

Dear friends,

I would like to warmly welcome you today to our event which will focus on the important topic of eliminating violence against children and the role of legislators with a focus on the valuable contribution of civil society.

Violence is a major impediment to a child’s well-being and a big obstacle to the realization of the full potential of the child. Violence against children is never justifiable. All forms of violence against children are preventable and should be condemned in the strongest possible terms. Considering children’s uniqueness of being vulnerable and dependent on adults it is imperative to provide them with full protection from violence and ensure the realization of their human rights.

The vulnerability of children to violence is linked to their age and evolving capacity. Because of their gender girls are particularly vulnerable to violence and abuse. Violence against women and girls remains one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world.

Every child has the right to freedom from all forms of violence. This is not just common sense and a moral standard but also an international legal obligation as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is true that legal obligations lie with States but to combat a phenomenon as pervasive as violence against children all sectors of society and all individuals indeed should be involved.

Bulgaria is strongly committed to the protection of children and the promotion of children’s rights in all its national policies and its external action.

Since the adoption of the Child Protection Act in 2000 Bulgaria has been building a nation-wide child protection system which also addresses issues related to prevention, identification and response to violence against children. In February 2017 the Bulgarian Government adopted the National Programme for Prevention of Violence and Abuse of Children. A National coordination mechanism for responding to violence against children is also functioning effectively.

Bulgaria has adopted strong legislation on child protection which is aligned with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Bulgaria's legal framework prohibits violence against children in all circumstances; corporal punishment is also prohibited by law. A reporting and referral system has been created that obliges all individuals, particularly professionals who engage with children, to report any alleged act of violence against children.

UNICEF is a valuable partner and plays a crucial role in all major national initiatives related to children's rights. The Bulgarian authorities, with the policy advice and technical assistance of UNICEF, are currently developing a Comprehensive national road map for the implementation of the National Programme for Prevention of Violence and Abuse of Children, including through amending legislation, improving effectiveness of coordination mechanisms and strengthening the capacity of professionals working with children to identify, recognize and adequately respond to violence.

The Government is working actively with UNICEF, civil society organizations, media and children themselves to create an environment of intolerance to all forms of violence against children, promote positive parenting practices and enable the necessary shift in attitudes and mindset. The direct engagement of children is key to the success of the process by ensuring that children know their rights, recognize and disclose violence and are aware of existing tools to report violence.

Bulgaria has a unique experience of actively involving civil society in drafting relevant legislation which has proven to be a very effective way of addressing major social challenges such as violence and abuse. We have here with us today prominent representatives of the civil society in Bulgaria - Ms. Genoveva Tisheva, the Managing Director of the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, and Ms. Diyana Videva, Board Member of the Alliance for Protection against Gender-based Violence.

I believe this event will help build alliances between civil society representatives and legislators who could benefit from the knowledge and expertise of organizations working on the ground in their efforts to create the most powerful legal framework to combat and eliminate this heinous phenomenon.

Thank you.