

A message from Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Independent Expert and leader of the United Nations Secretary General's Global Study on Violence against Children. To the congregation at Coventry Cathedral on the 14 October 2006

I send my warm greetings to you all at Coventry Cathedral where you have gathered because you believe that every child has the right to a life free from violence. You are meeting both for a service of celebration of children and to make an act of dedication, through the Coventry Charter, to join with others in implementing recommendations in the Global Report on Children and Violence. It is significant that you are holding this important service at Coventry Cathedral which is internationally recognised for its work towards non-violence, peace and reconciliation.

I have been deeply moved and inspired by the nine regional consultations on the Global Study on Violence against Children. Throughout the consultations and during other meetings, children on all continents have told me how much the routine, everyday violence they suffer in their homes, schools and other institutions hurts them both physically and 'inside'. They have told me that adult approval and acceptance of this violence upsets them greatly. The study should be a turning point – a challenge to social norms that condone any form of violence against children, including all corporal punishment. A core message of the Report is that all violence against children is preventable and no violence against children is justifiable, whether on the basis of tradition or disguised as discipline.

This is a study that belongs to children; children have contributed immeasurably to it. The critical starting point has been the experience of children themselves and they must be meaningfully involved in strategising and promoting action on violence against children.

Children cannot wait until they are eighteen to have their rights respected. We must act now. States must respect the obligations enshrined in the human rights treaties to address violence against children. But communities are key to addressing violence against children and I hope your religious groups and communities will be in the frontline in addressing violence against children. Children's uniqueness – their potential and their trust in adults makes it imperative that they have more not less protection from violence, and we must not let them down.

I wish you well for your service and in all your endeavours to end violence against children.

Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro
October 13th 2006