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Statement of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs Mary Robinson, on the occasion of the launch of the “Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children”

“I am particularly sensitive to the protection of the human rights of children, and the issue of corporal punishment is one of great importance to child rights.

“I am very supportive of this important initiative because I believe that physical punishment is a practice that sends the wrong message to children. It usually demonstrates the inability of adults to educate, and when necessary discipline, children by other means such as dialogue and discussion. It also shows adult ignorance of the capacity of children to understand and distinguish right from wrong, with proper guidance. The use of violence is a practice that can hamper the child’s development of his or her communication ability; it can encourage aggressive behaviour and can destroy the child’s self-confidence and internal value system. Physical punishment generates a destructive relationship based on force, between the adult and the young person; a relationship that can hinder trust within the family. Research shows that the use of physical punishment risks perpetuating the use of violence by successive generations.

“The recourse to physical punishment by adults reflects a denial of the recognition, by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, of the child as a subject of human rights. If we want to remain faithful to the spirit of the Convention, strongly based on the dignity of the child as a full-fledged bearer of rights, then any act of violence against him or her must be banned, in accordance with articles 19 and 28.2 of the Convention.

“The Convention on the Rights of the Child offers valuable tools to combat the use of corporal punishment. It requires States parties to take all necessary legislative measures to prohibit all forms of violence. It also encourages States to take preventive action, including through human rights education and by creating an environment conducive to the administration of discipline ‘in a manner consistent with the child’s human dignity’.

“I believe that in addition to legal prohibition, sensitization of all actors of society - in particular parents and teachers - to the negative impact of physical violence is a key aspect of the process leading to a non-violent society. Violence should never be legitimized.

“Physical punishment denies children their fundamental right to grow-up to become capable of making a responsible contribution to a free society. Children and adolescents deserve better than to be beaten for their so-called errors or disobedience. They deserve constant and quality guidance and attention; creative and enriching dialogue; and stimulating and challenging education. No form of violence, including physical, sexual or psychological, can ever be justified as being in the best interests of the child.

“For all these reasons, I can assure you of my full support to such a ‘Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children’ and I wish all success to the organizers of this campaign.”

Geneva, 10 April 2001