

# THE ARISE FOUNDATION

Arise is a UK and US registered charity, with offices in London and New York. Arise's vision is a slavery-free world in which the human dignity of every person is respected. Our mission is to confront the problem of human trafficking and slavery through frontline abolitionists. We seek to weave threads of solidarity between those devoted to the defence of human dignity at local level and those in a position to help them. The charity prioritises prevention work in countries of origin, with a clear focus on long-lasting, networked, community-based interventions. We currently work with networks present across Europe, India, South East Asia, Brazil and Africa.

Arise welcomes the chance to provide input from the Special Rapporteur on the sale and exploitation of children. The prevention and elimination of these heinous crimes should be the utmost priority for the international community; but in order to effectively do this, we need to change our focus to deal with long term structural issues that create vulnerabilities.

## CHALLENGING MINDSETS

Our partners in the Philippines are working with those who suffer the horrific crime of online sexual exploitation as well as those who perpetrate them. There is a worryingly common mindset that, because there is no physical act, there is no negative affect on the child: this means form of abuse is becoming 'normalised' with the most marginalised communities.

This mindset desperately needs to be challenged effectively, which must be done with a holistic view of the problems. There needs to be more public discussions and tools to show the unacceptability of this form of abuse. This cannot just focus on parents or perpetrators, but must also help the children and other individuals understand the cost of this crime. In India and Albania, our partners have reported that many young people are being lured into this kind of exploitation through the promise of gadgets and designer items. This is hard to counter, especially as social media and culture places so much on having the newest gadgets, but the Office of the Special Rapporteur should challenge this mindset and provide educational material on the cost of this form of exploitation.

## AWARENESS RAISING

The power of awareness raising, moreover, cannot be ignored. Arise and our partners have found repeatedly that in some of the most affected communities, either in India, Albania or the Philippines, there was a large language gap in terms of understanding the issue of exploitation. Many families when asked about trafficking or exploitation reported that they had never experienced it; but once the concept was fully explained, nearly all realised that they had actually suffered them without the language to explain the crime.

This meant that before any effective prevention work could occur, there needed to be a programme of awareness raising to ensure that all members of the community understood the crime and the narrative employed by those who facilitate it. One such awareness raising programme has occurred in Jharkhand, one of the poorest Indian source states for exploitation; for those rural villages often their only visitors are recruiters. By training local animators on what the realities were for the young girls and boys who were taken to the city for 'work', the programme managed to reach villagers and inform them of the reality of trafficking. It was only once they understood the reality behind the narrative that these families - all of whom were impoverished - began to take up the offered income diversification support and other prevention programmes. Moreover, the local panchayat (council leaders) also did not know about exploitation; once they were trained by the animators they decided to enact certification schemes allowing them to trace where recruiters were taking the children for work. Once this certification scheme had been used for a few months, there was a notable drop in the number of recruiters coming to their area.

The Office of the Special Rapporteur needs to advocate for the importance of awareness raising within prevention work and issue guidelines and support to help close these language gaps.

## **COMMUNITY-BASED SUSTAINABLE MODELS**

Sexual exploitation of children is an extremely clandestine crime, and one that is often linked to complex webs of causation. Often poverty and other push factors lead to parents feeling that this is a viable option to support their family. Our partners have found that, when they challenge this mindset, the families regularly report that there are no alternative sources of money. It is only through sustained relationships that they can effectively change the attitude of the perpetrators; there is a much lower chance of success with just an informational or educational campaign.

This kind of relationships are much easier to form if the organisations already enjoys social capital within the area, as it automatically raises the level of trust. This means that, when working through these institutions - which are often faith-based - a higher level of return can be got for a relatively small investment. One of Arise's projects, working in Northern India, has found that when the local partners explained issues of child exploitation and sale to the wider community many different stakeholders pooled resources to help ensure that the younger generation had access to education. This kind of community engagement only came about because of the high trust levels; within three months of establishment the three different religious groups present in the communities had offered their buildings and food as resources to educate all the local children, no matter their faith community.

Unfortunately, within current funding structures, very little money goes to frontline organisations who are capable of delivering this kind of work. The Office of the Special Rapporteur should use its mandate to investigate the importance of these local actors in combatting this crime and encourage funding processes to find a way to support this local work effectively.

## **REINTEGRATION SUPPORT**

All of our partners offering shelter and support highlighted the importance of long term reintegration support. Many shelters end up supporting individuals for much longer than initially conceived as it is not safe to return to their communities. Where child exploitation occurred because of vulnerabilities such as poverty, the rescued child faces the same issues when returned. Arise's partners have found that their shelter work must be complemented by NGOs and local government coordinating to ensure better opportunities and programmes for families. The Office of the Special Rapporteur should use its position to encourage this kind of integrated support. It should also highlight the importance of local government support for national governments to achieve the SDGs, especially poverty-relief and education.

## **ENGAGEMENT WITH PRIVATE SECTOR**

The prevention and elimination of sexual exploitation of children cannot only be considered the realm of the government and third sector; the private sector must be encouraged to play their part. While Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and other community-engagement programmes have, and continue, to rise, corporations need to be encouraged to view this work as more than just a philanthropic or volunteering opportunity. Especially for businesses with a risk of child exploitation within their model - such as hotels, money transfer institutions etc - there needs to be an understanding that CSR and other interventions can act as powerful tool of policing their supply chain and advocating for a wider good. The Office of the Special Rapporteur should use its mandate to encourage this shift in mindset within corporations, and encourage them to see their responsibilities within wider communities.

## **INTERNATIONAL COORDINATION**

Child sexual exploitation, especially online exploitation, is a cross border crime that often occurs in several jurisdictions. Legal systems have greatly improved their ability to prosecute these crimes internationally, but there is a long way to go, and too often these systems do not effectively coordinate with local CSOs and NGOs. The Office of the Special Rapporteur should use its mandate to advocate for closer cooperation, highlighting initiatives such as Global Taskforce on Sexual Exploitation and advocating for more resources and countries to join this model.

Our partners in the Philippines have raised issues of known sex offenders often coming to their country, and especially known sex hubs, for 'tourism'; they argue for integrated approaches not only in the prosecution but also in the prevention. Border guards and immigration should be empowered to question why a known sex offender or pedophile is travelling to a known hotspot for child exploitation, with the right to refuse entry at ports. The Office should use its powers to advocate for these kinds of border protections to try and lower the demand within high-risk areas.