

Statement by Ms. Mama Fatima SINGHATEH

Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children

International Conference on Building Solution to Child Sexual Abuse

Manila, 16-17 October 2024

I am very pleased to issue this statement in support of **international conference on Building Solution to Child Sexual Abuse** taking place in Manila between the 16 and the 17 October 2024 and organised by **Centre for Prevention and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse (CPTCSA), a member of the Family for Every Child Alliance.**

I understand that one of the key interests of the Alliance is to advocate for **April 16th as an International Day to Protect Boys from Sexual Violence through their Blue Umbrella Day campaign.**

I find this initiative quite commendable because it will galvanize global support to protect boys from sexual violence and ensure that their rights and well-being are prioritised.

You will recall that in 2021 I presented to the UN General Assembly a report on the **“Gender dimension of the sexual exploitation of children and the importance of integrating a child-centred and gender-inclusive approach to combating and eradicating it”**, wherein I highlighted the importance of providing equal protection to all children independent of gender and irrespective of who they are, while at the same time shaping support and care mechanisms in a manner that is gender-informed and gender-sensitive.

To do so, I continue to encourage governments to design policies that factor in the fact that boys are equally exposed to sexual violence, especially those who are within vulnerable groups such as boys with disabilities, diverse gender identities, and those in institutional care or locked facilities. Child protection systems should also be designed to be inclusive, recognizing and addressing the unique vulnerabilities of boys to create safer environments for all children.

It would be important and governments are encouraged to increase investment in research to better understand the scale and context of sexual violence against boys, challenging harmful stereotypes, and driving evidence-based policies that ensure boys are not left behind in the fight against child sexual abuse.

There needs to be more awareness on this issue amongst different stakeholders to better respond to the challenges of under-reporting, and associated stigma, while at the same time design services that address the specific needs of boys.

Coordination and cooperation among relevant stakeholders is important to support concrete actions to prevent and halt the sexual exploitation of boys to address and tackle gender-driven demand, ensure rapid identification of victims and coordinated referral mechanisms, and provide child-friendly and gender-sensitive reporting and complaint mechanisms to report exploitative behaviour online and offline.

A concerted effort from all stakeholders is therefore required in order to achieve gender-inclusive child protection systems which protect and empower children – girls, boys and those who identify outside the gender binary – with their own unique developing personalities and characteristics as rights holders with agency.

Thank you.