

31 May 2017

## **An open letter to the UN, UN Agencies and Member States**

We are writing on behalf of a network of nearly 140 nongovernmental organizations around the world to urge all governments to respond to the recent United Nations funding appeal for the Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty. The UN General Assembly requested that the Secretary-General commission this Study, Professor Manfred Nowak has been appointed as an Independent Expert to lead the effort, but the whole process is now at risk without proper funding.

**For this reason, we are urging all UN Member States to provide crucially needed financial support to the Study and wish to stress three main arguments explaining why such support is critical:**

### **1. The Study is a tool to support Member States in meeting their obligations under international law and fulfilling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals commit to leaving no one behind. Yet this commitment cannot be met, if children deprived of liberty remain uncounted. We do not know how many children are detained worldwide, and without even this basic information it is impossible to respond to their needs. Children deprived of liberty are more likely to become victims of violence and exploitation and usually do not enjoy their rights to education, health care and access to justice. These children should be considered as among the furthest behind. Fulfilling the ambitious vision set by the SDGs requires that all children, particularly those living outside of their home environment, are counted and their situations addressed.

### **2. The Study will be a catalyst for change and a milestone in the development of alternatives to detention of children**

Like the two previous UN studies on children—the 1996 Study on Children and Armed Conflict led by Graça Machel and the 2006 Study on Violence against Children led by Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro—the UN Study on Children Deprived of Liberty has the potential of bringing global attention to critical issues relating the deprivation of children and sparking far-reaching national and global reforms. The Study is a tool that will provide concrete recommendations in law, policy and practice to Member States on all forms of deprivation of liberty. Carrying out this Study does not need a permanent mandate to be established to translate the results into long-lasting impact. Follow-up can be mainstreamed into the existing mandates of UN agencies already working on different aspects and forms of detention of children.

Too many children are unnecessary deprived of their liberty, causing significant harm. This Study will present practical and effective solutions to treat children in a better way.

### **3. In the long-term, investing in the Study and in alternatives to detention will lead to significant savings and societal benefits**

There is a cost for the Study, but this can be offset by enormous social and financial benefits. Studies have shown that reducing the number of children deprived of liberty can result in higher levels of education, better livelihoods, lower crime rates, and healthier communities. Reducing children in detention can also provide substantial financial benefits to States: developing effective non-custodial measures is less costly than investing in detention facilities. Importantly, the Study is not a naming and shaming exercise, nor an end in itself.

Therefore, we call upon your Excellencies to respond to the United Nations funding appeal for the Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty. Individual contributions from States do not need to be large to make the Study possible. Small contributions from many States could make the Study a reality.

Yours sincerely,



Jo Becker  
Children's Rights Advocacy Director  
Human Rights Watch



Alex Kamarotos  
Executive Director  
Defence for Children International

Co-conveners, NGO Panel for the Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty  
(full list of endorsing groups is available at [www.childrendeprivedofliberty.info](http://www.childrendeprivedofliberty.info))

Annex:

- Full list of the NGO Panel signatories
- OHCHR Funding appeal