



## **18 November - World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Violence**

### **States must urgently step up their actions to protect children against all forms of violence across the World**

**18 November 2023, Geneva:** We are witnessing a failure of the international community to protect and uphold children's rights across the World. And yet, children are full human rights holders and require special protection by states and non-state actors.

Today, many challenges are unfolding before our eyes: pandemics, armed conflicts, natural disasters. Children are frequently targeted, and their rights are often violated, sometimes under the justification of custom, culture or security and other measures.

More than 30 million children have been displaced by conflict and many are enslaved, trafficked, and abused. In the last 20 years, more than 315,000 grave violations were verified against children in more than 30 conflict situations across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. However due to chronic underreporting, the actual number is undoubtedly much higher.

Children are ten times more likely to become victims of conflict-related sexual violence. As the most neglected and marginalized survivors and victims of sexual violence, child victims continue to be invisible, and their perpetrators remain unpunished, thus perpetuating a system of abuse.

Urgent action is needed to prevent and protect children and their rights. For that, we all have individual and collective responsibility to raise our voices and act. It is paramount that we include children with their diverse needs and perspectives in the development of policies, programmes and measures, and uphold their rights.

Accountability is a crucial prevention measure. Investigations and prosecutions of sexual violence against children need to be prioritized and conducted in a child appropriate manner. There are many challenges that prevent or deter children and their families from coming forward for help. They include societal attitudes towards children and sexual violence that lead to crimes being under-reported; lack of information available for children about their rights; lack of child-friendly procedures and services; lack of trained case workers and psychologists in courts, lack of child friendly spaces; and children's voices being unheard in justice processes.

In line with this year's theme 'for every child, every right', Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) is prioritising access to justice for child victims of conflict-related sexual violence in

conflict-affected and fragile regions in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. LAW is committed to combatting impunity for sexual violence against children and to provide child victims and survivors with the tools, support, and platforms they require to voice their needs and actively participate in justice processes.

Children and youth are the adults of tomorrow. Investing in their wellbeing, we invest in a better future for all.