

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

46th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the sale and exploitation of children

Oral statement delivered by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

2 March 2021

On behalf of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, I thank the Special Rapporteur for her comprehensive report on *the impact of coronavirus on the sale and sexual exploitation of children*.

Restrictions to curb the spread of Covid-19 have resulted in school closures across 188 countries, with approximately 1.6 billion children affected worldwide.¹ We appreciate the Special Rapporteur highlighting how school closures and the shift to online teaching increase social isolation and unsupervised internet use, thus putting children at greater risk from those who seek to take advantage of these new vulnerabilities.² Frontline civil society organisations from the Commonwealth 8.7 Network³ in both Asia and the Caribbean have reported increasing numbers of ‘cybersex traffickers’ targeting children during the pandemic.

Universal ratification of the ILO’s *Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention* in 2020 was a significant milestone. However, data shows that only 57% of Commonwealth countries have criminalised child prostitution, and only 70% have criminalised child pornography. States must align domestic legislation with international standards by fully criminalising these heinous practices and ensuring sufficiently stringent penalties to deter would-be perpetrators.

We urge all States to continue to collaborate with civil society and international institutions to develop and implement timely, sustainable solutions to achieve SDG Targets 8.7 and 16.2.

Time is running out.

Thank you.

¹ UNICEF (2020) *Education and COVID-19*. Retrieved 24 February 2021, from <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/covid-19/>

² United Nations Human Rights Council, *Impact of coronavirus disease on different manifestations of sale and sexual exploitation of children: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material, Mama Fatima Singhateh A/HRC/46/31* (22 January 2021). Retrieved 25 February 2021, from <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/46/31>

³ An international member-driven network of over 60 national and local civil society organisations from all regions who share a common vision to eradicate contemporary forms of slavery and human trafficking. Founded by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, the Commonwealth 8.7 Network serves as a knowledge-sharing platform, working collaboratively to raise awareness, build capacity, provide support to survivors, and advocate for change to laws and policies.