

Statement

of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against
Children,

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Week against Child Abuse

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Sexual violence against children: the numbers tell the tale

Today marks the start of the Dutch Week against Child Abuse. The goal is to raise public awareness of child abuse. As the National Rapporteur, I would like to specifically draw your attention to sexual violence against children. But I do not only want your attention for this issue. I want to know whether we, as a society, are *really* helping the children who fall victim to this. That is why I believe that the results of our approach should be measurable. As the saying goes: the numbers tell the tale.

Together we must strive to eliminate all forms of sexual violence against children. The United Nations gave shape to this global ambition with two of its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals. Goal five (gender equality for women and girls) and goal sixteen (to create a peaceful and inclusive global society) ask nations to end all forms of violence – including sexual violence – against women and girls, and children respectively. These goals will be pursued globally until 2030.

However, the United Nations do not stop at creating beautiful goals for every country. In order to be sure that these goals are being achieved, the United Nations have developed indicators that make these goals measurable. These indicators allow the United Nations to monitor in which areas countries achieve progress, and in which they fall short. This means that there is global agreement that the approach to sexual violence against children must be measured.

The Netherlands also makes great efforts to reduce the amount of victims and their suffering. Necessary changes were made in the last couple of years: the Dutch national police and The Public Prosecution Service have made reporting sexual violence more accessible. From now

on, victims will be called victims, not notifiers. The Government decided to make the reporting centres for child maltreatment stronger *and* more accessible so more abused children will appear on its radar. The amount of Sexual Violence Centres, where healthcare for victims and police live under the same roof, grew from eight to thirteen. The Netherlands also looks beyond its borders: our country is the most important financial contributor to an international study on child sex tourism to prevent not only the victimisation of children in our country, but also in other parts of the world.

The Government is not the only one concerned with sexual violence against children. I recently spoke with Stevie Bos, the seventeen-year-old winner of the ‘Pimp the state-of-the-Union address’ competition. Her alternative address asked for more attention towards dealing with victims within police academies. I am impressed that a child would ask attention for this issue. It shows that our society is also actively contributing to possible solutions.

Each and every one of these efforts is commendable. I hope and expect that they will reduce the suffering of children. But we should not simply be satisfied with hoping and expecting: we need to *know* that these efforts are helping.

This is proving to be difficult in the Netherlands. There are 71 certified interventions by youth welfare services that purport to help victims of sexual violence. Only two of these interventions have been proven to be ‘effective’. The others have been labelled ‘well-founded’: people expect it to work, but do not *know* whether that’s the case. The same holds for the two recognized interventions for reducing the recidivism of (young) sexual offenders. Ever since the decentralisation of youth care to municipalities, it has become impossible to figure out how many victims of child abuse and sexual abuse are receiving care and in which forms. The Central Statistics Office (CBS) has concluded that ‘no data are available’ for the measurement of the indicators of child abuse for the Sustainable Development Goals. The CBS also found that the data from the child abuse reporting centres does not paint a clear picture for our country because of its inconsistencies. So how are we then supposed to know whether our approach is doing what it is intending to do?

I know that The Netherlands, just like the United Nations, wants to help and prevent as many victims of sexual violence as possible. But if we do not measure our results, we cannot know whether we are succeeding. It is crucial that we not just act, but study *how* we act, and track

the results of our actions. Only then will children become less likely to fall victim to sexual violence, and will the children who do become victims suffer as little as possible. The numbers tell the tale: keeping track will tell us whether we are on the right track to *really* help the children we want to help.