

## **ADVOCACY MESSAGES ON PHYSICAL AND HUMILIATING PUNISHMENT**

### **Introduction:**

These advocacy messages are for Save the Children's staff and partners working at all levels around the world. They reflect the priorities within the Child Protection Initiative Strategy for Physical and Humiliating Punishment, are derived from the work and learning of Save the Children and partners over the years, and are relevant to both development and humanitarian settings. The messages have been developed in consultation with different Save the Children Members via the Child Protection Initiative and its Task Group on Physical and Humiliating Punishment.

### ***What does Save the Children want to achieve regarding Physical and Humiliating Punishment (PHP)?***

- We want to achieve *legal ban*—states prohibiting PHP in their legal framework.
- We want to achieve *total elimination*— states going from *prohibition* to *elimination* by changing the social attitudes and behaviours that allow children to be hit and treated in a humiliating way.

### ***Who is Save the Children targeting with these messages?***

- These messages are targeting policy and law makers and focus on action that States/Governments should take. To some extent the messages could be revised to target other audiences such as parents, teachers, social workers, medical personnel and the general public, but they are not formulated specifically for those target groups.

### ***Who will use these advocacy messages and how?***

- The messages are for internal use in the sense that Save the Children staff can use them as standard messages in their proposals, advocacy plans, communication etc. They will work as an extension of the existing [Position Statement on PHP](#)<sup>1</sup>, focusing more on messages and on what governments should do.
- The messages are also for external use in the sense that they will form the base of what Save will communicate in external statements on this issue and provide the standard language to be used.
- The messages should be adjusted to local context when needed, e.g. by adding country and region specific examples and statistics. Using them you must take into account need and capacity assessments, the security situation on the ground, relationship with the government and collaboration with partners.

### **Background:**

Save the Children uses the term Physical and Humiliating Punishment (in place of corporal punishment) to capture the wide array of disciplining methods used by adults towards children, which may include corporal or physical punishment, and the threat of it, as well as psychological punishment that belittles, scares or ridicules the child. PHP is extremely prevalent across the globe – on average four in five children are subjected to some kind of violent discipline in the home<sup>2</sup> - in individual countries the

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<sup>1</sup>Save the Children's position statement on the prohibition and elimination of corporal/physical and humiliating punishment of children <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/save-childrens-position-statement-prohibition-and-elimination-corporalphysical-and-0>

<sup>2</sup>Percentage of children aged 2 to 14 years who experienced any violent discipline (psychological aggression and/physical punishment) in the past month, United Nations Children's Fund, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, UNICEF, New York, 2014

number is as high as 95<sup>3</sup>. In global consultations in preparation for the Sustainable Development Goals children and young people from all regions and from all social groups have ranked violence as their top-two development priority and violence from close caregivers is also raised by child-led organisations in many countries. By May 2015, only 46 countries in the world have a total ban of corporal punishment in all settings. This means that a large majority of children in the world are living in countries where they are not protected against physical and humiliating punishment. Save the Children believes that laws, and their effective enforcement and implementation through comprehensive measures, including awareness raising and education on forms of non-violent discipline of children, can prevent violence against children and help parents, other caregivers and teachers to change their attitudes and behaviours.

Therefore Save the Children work together with partners to advocate for legal reforms and support awareness-raising initiatives leading to social change affecting attitudes and practices. In addition, Save the Children promotes parenting and positive discipline programmes targeting caregivers, teachers and other people working with children. The importance of involving children and young people in our programmes on corporal punishment is crucial to our credibility as a child rights organization. These advocacy messages should be used in the framework of comprehensive programmatic work to prohibit and eliminate physical and humiliating punishment.

### Messages:

1. **Human Rights: Physical and humiliating punishment is a violation of children's human rights to physical integrity, human dignity and equal protection under the law.** It is enshrined in several legal documents, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 19, 28 and 37 and the Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment no. 8). In contexts where PHP is admitted by the law, protection of children becomes difficult, as it implies that there are some forms or levels of violence against children which are legitimate. It is important to send a clear signal that *no* violence against children is acceptable. It is not legal to use violence against an adult – why should it be legal to hit a child that is more vulnerable?
2. **Human Rights: The practice of physical and humiliating punishment have a negative impact on children's mental and physical development,** their school attendance, their health and even their survival. Hence it contributes to the violation of additional fundamental child rights such as the right to education (UNCRC Article 28) and the right to survival and development (a UNCRC guiding principle, Article 6), which governments are responsible to respect, protect and fulfil in accordance with a human rights perspective.
3. **Child Development: Physical and humiliating punishment can cause serious physical and psychological harm to the child.** Immediate risks include physical injuries, such as broken bones and deep wounds. Evidence shows that physical and humiliating punishment also has long term consequences. These include negative effects on brain development, chronic pain, depression and premature mortality and can significantly worsen the child's possibility to live a healthy life<sup>4</sup>. No

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<sup>3</sup> Why children's protection from violence must be at the heart of the Post-2015 development agenda - A review of Consultations with Children on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, Save the Children, Plan International, The Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children, New York, 2014

<sup>4</sup> Several studies suggest that corporal punishment can have a negative impact on children's **cognitive development**. Experiencing harsh physical punishment may reduce the volume of the brain's grey matter in areas associated with intelligence and poor performance in school. This is indicated by research from US, Yemen, South Africa and West Africa. The negative relationship between physical punishment and **poor mental health** (e.g. depression, hostility, and aggression) is shown in research from US, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Brazil, China, Canada and Saudi Arabia. *Review of research on the effects of corporal punishment: Working Paper*, Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of children, April 2013.

research has shown that physical punishment enhances children's development<sup>5</sup>. This evidence comes from all regions of the world, and there is no support for the idea that the effects of physical and humiliating punishment vary across cultures or according to context<sup>6</sup>.

4. **Child development: All kinds and levels of violence is detrimental for children.** Research have compared the effects of socially accepted "physical punishment" (lighter, more infrequent) with the effects of socially unaccepted "physical abuse" (frequent violence, with severe impact) and have found overwhelming evidence that even light or infrequent corporal punishment is damaging to children<sup>7</sup>. In addition, both are on a continuum of violence. "Light smacks" can and often does escalate to more violent assault<sup>8</sup>. Therefore all physical and humiliating punishment needs to be eliminated.
5. **Religion: All religions promote that children should be well taken care of. Hitting children and causing them pain is incompatible with the values expressed in all religious teachings,** which are very similar to the human rights principles of respect for human dignity, equality, justice and non-violence. These universal values are shared by all religious communities and a growing number of religious leaders have recognised the need to highlight and put them into action towards eliminating all corporal punishment of children<sup>9</sup>. Religious leaders and communities must work together, regardless of different theological denominations, and advocate for a child upbringing that does not include violence.
6. **Religion: Religious leaders and communities command a profound authority and influence in ending violence against children.** A growing number of religious leaders publicly acknowledge that PHP is at odds with and debases their religious principles and core religious beliefs. Many are involved in the movement for the elimination and prohibition of PHP and regard ending this injustice towards children as a religious imperative.
7. **Culture: All cultures have a responsibility to protect children from violence, and all cultures have some intrinsic values of peace and non-violence.** The idea that hitting children can be a matter of cultural pride is unacceptable. Human rights are universal, and children the world over have the right to live lives free from all forms of violence. All cultures have a responsibility to disown corporal punishment, just as they have disowned other breaches of human rights which once formed a part of their traditions. Movements to end corporal punishment of children exists in all continents.
8. **Parenting: All parents want what is best for their children. Many parents think that physical and humiliating punishment is the only way to teach and discipline children. However evidence shows that PHP does not have a disciplining effect.** Instead things such as yelling, slapping or verbally humiliating a child have a negative impact on the relationship between the parent and the child, and contribute to a cycle of violence where children grow up to be violent adults<sup>10</sup>. Parents must be given tools to enable them to bring up their children without violence and humiliation.

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<sup>5</sup> "Physical punishment of children: lessons from 20 years of research" Durrant, J. & Ensom, R. (2012), , Canadian Medical Association Journal, 6 February 2012

<sup>6</sup> *Review of research on the effects of corporal punishment: Working Paper*, Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of children, April 2013.

<sup>7</sup> "Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: A meta-analytic and theoretical review", *Psychological Bulletin*, 128(4), 539-579, Gershoff, E. T. (2002),; see also E. T. Gershoff (2008), *Report on physical punishment in the United States: what research tells us about its effects on children*, Center for Effective Discipline, Columbus, Ohio

<sup>8</sup> *Why prohibition of all corporal punishment is essential in fulfilling children's right to protection from violence: messages from research*. Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, March 2014.

<sup>9</sup> *Ending Corporal Punishment of Children – A handbook for working with and within religious communities*. Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of children, April 2011.

<sup>10</sup> The co-relation between physical punishment and violent behaviour later in life is shown in research from Nigeria, US, Israel, New Zealand, Chile, Canada, Latin America, the Caribbean, Brazil, Croatia, Rwanda and

9. **Societal level: There are long term, large scale implications of Physical and Humiliating Punishment.** PHP and its consequences have significant cost implications on a societal level. Research estimates that the economic costs of physical, sexual and psychological violence against children at a global level ranges between 2-8% of the global GDP.<sup>11</sup> This can include cost for short and long term medical care in case of physical or psychological injuries, cost for legal services, and the cost of reduced educational outputs due to increased drop-out rates or reduced learning ability in schools. Activities to preventing violence against children are therefore very cost effective.
10. **Education: When violence and abuse are part of the school environment children's rights to education and protection are neither respected nor fulfilled.** For a child to be able to learn they need to feel protected and safe in their school environment. A child who is afraid of being punished by his/her teacher or other persons in the school will have a more difficult time going to school, staying in school and focus on learning when in school. To provide a child with protection and safety in the education system is therefore key to ensure children receive the quality education they are entitled to.

#### Call for Action:

11. **Government Action (Legal Reform): States are obliged to put in place laws to ban all forms of PHP in line with the UN CRC and other international human rights and humanitarian standards to which they are signatories.** Evidence shows<sup>12</sup> that a legal ban of PHP in a country significantly contributes to the reduced prevalence of PHP and changed attitudes and norms towards this form of violence. The aim of legal reform is not to punish parents, but to send a clear message that violence against children is never tolerated. A legal framework which prohibits physical and humiliating violence also provides a solid basis for the promotion of positive, non-violent relationships with children.
12. **Government Action (Awareness raising): Governments must ensure that laws are widely known by everyone, implemented through relevant policies and programs, monitored and enforced.** Governments should work together with relevant actors, including civil society organisations and religious leaders, to ensure that the information reaches all level of society, from parents and caregivers, to teachers, paediatricians, academia and media, in order to build a change of attitude. This is crucial to ensure children are protected, and that physical and humiliating punishment is not only prohibited but also eliminated.
13. **Government Action (Parenting education and Services): Governments must ensure that adults, including parents, caregivers, teachers, social workers and healthcare practitioners, have access to education and mentoring, including training on positive discipline methods to allow them use non-violent methods for bringing up children.** Parents and children should have access

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Mexico. *Review of research on the effects of corporal punishment: Working Paper*, Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of children, April 2013.

<sup>11</sup> *The costs and economic impact of violence against children*; Paola Pereznieto, Andres Montes, Iara Langston and Solveig Routier, ODI and Child Fund Alliance, September 2014

<sup>12</sup> In Sweden, where corporal punishment was prohibited in 1979, prevalence reduced from ca 95% in the 1960's to 11% in 2010. The proportion of persons positive towards the use of physical punishment went from ca 56% to ca 9% in the same time period. Comparative research comparing countries who have and have not banned corporal punishment shows similar trends, although the information has not been gathered for as many years (countries studies include Bulgaria, Moldova, Latvia, Poland, Austria, Germany, Finland, Norway, Cyprus, Denmark, Croatia, Israel, Italy, Spain, France, Ukraine and Lithuania). Source: *Research in countries which have prohibited all corporal punishment*, <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/frame.html>, accessed 2015-05-22.

to preventive and responsive services, including access to psycho-social and legal services to enable them to fully recover after experiencing violence. Positive discipline methods should be integrated as part of the curriculum in teachers colleges.

14. **Government Action (Regional): Governments should work regionally, through regional coalitions and groups, to discuss a legal ban on PHP and raise awareness on positive discipline methods in their geographic area.** Governments have a responsibility to monitor and support the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in other states than their own.
15. **Government Action (Humanitarian Settings): Government and other humanitarian actors when governments are unable or unwilling should take action to protect children against violence as a first line response in humanitarian crises.** Patterns of violence, including physical and humiliating punishment, is always heightened in humanitarian settings. Families and other sources of protection are often put under immense strain and the weakened protective environment around the child may result in family or community members abusing the child, making children more vulnerable for physical and humiliating punishment, with consequences lasting long after the humanitarian crises has been resolved.
16. **Government Action (Civil Society): States must ensure that there is space and opportunity for civil society organisations to engage in, and act for, a prohibition and elimination of Physical and Harmful Practices.** Civil society should build alliances and work closely together to broaden the base of support to eliminate PHP and to build a society free of violence.
17. **Government Action (Data and Evidence): Governments should collect disaggregated data in order to track prevalence and identify and monitor the impact of Physical and Humiliating Punishment on different groups of children.** This is in line with their responsibility as signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (clarified in General Comment 5). The data is crucial to be able to prevent and respond to violence in the best possible ways, and to be able to track the impact of different measures taken to reduce physical and humiliating punishment of children<sup>13</sup>.
18. **Government Action (Child Participation): Governments and actors involved in combatting PHP should actively engage with children and respect their views in all aspects of preventing, responding to and monitor PHP against them.** States should give all children the opportunity to participate, regardless of age, gender, disability, language, ethnicity, financial situation or other issues. This is in line with the UNCRC, article 12, on respecting the views of children. Children can provide a unique source of information, can provide insights into the complexities of their social lives and be highly effective and influential advocates.

### References and further reading:

- *Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: A meta-analytic and theoretical review*, Psychological Bulletin, 128(4), 539-579; E. T. Gershoff 2002
- *Ending Corporal Punishment of Children – A handbook for working with and within religious communities*. Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of children, April 2011
- *Ending Physical and Humiliating Punishment of Children- Making it Happen: Global Submission with Recommendations, Prevalence and Attitudes, and Good Practice examples by The*

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<sup>13</sup> Which data collection approach that could be promoted depends on the local context. The Multi Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) has a module on Child Discipline but MICS is not suitable in all countries. For advice please contact the CPI MEAL advisor or the PHP Task Group Lead.

*International Save the Children Alliance- Part 1. Submission to the UN Study on Violence against Children, Save the Children Sweden 2005*

- *Ending violence against children in and around schools*, Policy Brief, Save the Children International 2011
- *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, UNICEF, New York, 2014
- *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*. Child Protection Working Group (CPWG), 2012
- *Physical punishment of children: lessons from 20 years of research*, Durrant, J. & Ensom, R, Canadian Medical Association Journal, 6 February 2012
- *Prohibiting all corporal punishment of children: Frequently Asked Questions*. Available at <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/frame.html> (This document provides useful responses to the most common questions on the prohibition of physical and humiliating punishment).
- *Prohibition and elimination of corporal/physical and humiliating punishment of children*, Position Statement, Save the Children International 2013
- *Report on physical punishment in the United States: what research tells us about its effects on children*, E.T. Gershoff, Center for Effective Discipline, Columbus, Ohio, 2008
- *Review of research on the effects of corporal punishment: Working Paper*, Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, April 2013
- *Save the Children's Child Protection Strategy 2013-2015: Prohibition and Elimination of Physical and Humiliating Punishment of Children*, Save the Children/Child Protection Initiative June 2013
- *The costs and economic impact of violence against children*; Paola Perezniето, Andres Montes, Iara Langston and Solveig Routier, ODI and Child Fund Alliance, September 2014
- *Physical and Humiliating Punishment page on OneNet*, [https://onenet.savethechildren.net/whatwedo/child\\_protection/Pages/Physical-and-Humiliating-Punishment.aspx](https://onenet.savethechildren.net/whatwedo/child_protection/Pages/Physical-and-Humiliating-Punishment.aspx)

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