

Statement by the Consortium for Street Children during the Human Rights Council Virtual Informal Conversation with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

09/04/2020

“The rights of children in street situations during the covid-19 pandemic”

Thank you Madam High Commissioner, Thank you Madam President,

Consortium for Street Children recognises that during this unprecedented public health crisis, governments are doing their best to protect their populations from increasing transmission rates and to offer the best possible health care to those who fall seriously ill, while upholding human rights standards. The Covid-19 crisis is in fact two crises – a public health crises and an economic crisis that will impact on the poorest of the globe disproportionately.

Consortium for Street Children would like to bring to the attention of the UN Human Rights Council and all Member States that children in street situations are being hit particularly hard by this pandemic and the two crises that are unfolding. The main health threat for anyone who catches COVID-19 is poor immune systems and underlying health conditions, and there is widespread evidence that among children in street situations and their families the prevalence of respiratory diseases and HIV, among other diseases, is particularly high.

When people are told to self-isolate, children in street situations may not have a safe home to go to. When told to wash their hands frequently, they have no soap or clean water to do it with. And when instructions are given out over the internet or in newspapers, most cannot read them and remain uninformed of even basic information. They are unable find the means to feed themselves. They are experiencing untold horrors, difficulties and human rights violations.

Currently our Network Members report two different but related situations – one is that children in street situations, because they have no longer any means of meagre subsistence on the street, are coming to them in overwhelming numbers with needs for food, services and shelter, and they don't have the means to provide for them. Other Network Members tell us that due to their shelters being closes or outreach work suspended, children in street situations are now hidden and extremely vulnerable to abuse as there is no one who is able to look out for them.

Because of self-isolation orders, and fines or criminal sanctions for those who can't comply, street children are at high risk of being persecuted and may have an interest in staying hidden now more than ever. This makes them even more vulnerable and invisible.

We, therefore, call on to all UN Members States to take the following three steps for children in street situations during this pandemic:

1. Collaborate with NGOs to provide safe, child and age appropriate shelter for all children in street situations to safely self-isolate, in line with the principles of child participation and the best interest of the child, and not punish or criminalize them for having nowhere else to go.
2. Make sure children in street situations have access to essential services, by including and prioritising them in schemes and emergency funding that you are putting in place in your country. For instance, by providing hand washing stations on the streets, food outreach programmes, and to recognise social workers conducting street outreach as essential workers and allow them to

continue work during lockdowns. We ask Governments to allow health services to be accessed without a birth registration or an adult present.

3. Provide information and advice on how to stay safe during this pandemic that is easy to access and understand for children in street situations, including those with limited or no ability to read.

Thank you Madam President.