4. KEY MESSAGES

1. Violence against street children is not inevitable. It can and must be prevented.

2. Street children are highly exposed to violence from multiple sources. Gender, age, ethnicity and disability influence these risks. Public hostility and stigmatization are also a common form of violence experienced by street children.

3. Street children face accumulated experiences of violence which impacts their development and life choices. In the absence of alternative models, parenting is likely to draw on their own experiences as children, suggesting the perpetuation of abuse through the life cycle and across generations.

4. Effective policies and service provision must address the wider environmental system (of family relationships, community and society) within which the child develops and with which he or she interacts.

5. Family relationships form a vital development pathway for children. Violence, neglect and abuse in the home undermine children's development and can reduce their ability to care for themselves in later life. Evidence that street children have experienced violence in the home – from active abuse to neglect – is overwhelming, across the world.

6. Most of the children who work or live in the streets come from poor households in poor, and increasingly urban, neighbourhoods. There are consistent links between concentrated poverty, high unemployment levels and child abuse.

7. Preventing children from taking to the streets means preparing children, families, neighbourhoods and governments to reduce violence and provide supportive environments for developing children's capabilities. Protecting street children from further violence means preparing police forces, detention and welfare centres to eliminate violence and nurture children's mental and physical health, their resilience and coping strategies, and working together with families and neighbourhoods.

8. Wider society plays a vital role in the lives of street children. Customs and values of mainstream society shape attitudes towards violence, human rights and children. Mainstream society creates conditions which can push families and children to the limit, or an environment in which children can flourish. The State provides also institutions and detention centres and NGOs develop programmes such as shelter care facilities, which can be highly detrimental to children or can help them towards reintegration. When violence is understood as social, implications for social policies and service provision are profound. Family violence, considered in many cultures as a private matter, can be recognized as a clear matter for public intervention.

9. When social institutions are stressed and community cohesion breaks down, in times of war, natural disasters, health epidemics or rapid urbanization for example, children's risk of violence grows as protective barriers crumble. In general, violence experienced by society at large is reflected in incidence of violence in the home and in public spaces.