

OUR CAPITAL OF SYMPATHY: TURNING IT INTO RESULTS

Speech delivered by: Mirela Oprea, ChildPact Secretary General

Place and date: Child Protection Network, Armenia, Yerevan, October 10 2014

Minister, dear CPN members, dear friends,

Thank you for inviting me to address your first General Assembly.

I represent [ChildPact](#), the regional coalition for child protection. ChildPact has [members](#) in 10 different countries and it represents more than 600 NGOs which work with more than 500,000 vulnerable children as direct beneficiaries. We are a network of networks, meaning that our members are NOT individual NGOs, but networks of NGOs that decide to come together in a joint representational body.

I should make a presentation about ChildPact and talk to you about how we were created, about our mission and goals, about our plans for the future. But that might be boring. Nobody wants to hear about other people's business. We are all interested in our OWN business, our own worries, our own careers. So let me talk about your business instead of talking about 'my' business.

I will talk about three main things that are of interest to us all. We are all in the business of: delivering services for our beneficiaries, advocating for better policies for children, ensuring the sustainability of our own organization.

- 1. Delivering services for our beneficiaries:** We work with the most vulnerable children (street children, institutionalized children, children exploited through labor) and we are moved by their plight. We want to help them. There are many people who want to help children, but our business is to do it in a systematic and accountable way. These are not our own children, so this creates additional, sometimes, bureaucratic responsibilities for us.
- 2. Advocating for better policies.** Many state policies harm the children we want to help. It is not that public money is used in a way that is not ultimately useful for children. It is much worse: sometimes public money is used to harm them, to make their lives even

worse. And here we can think about children in institutions who live in terror, like in concentration camps. Or education systems which become mechanisms for the social exclusion of the children with disabilities, of the children who are too poor to buy the required school supplies or for children who have to work in the morning when classes take place. We know about these children and how policies harm them because we can see it with our own eyes. And we make it our business to show these realities to the decision-makers and work with them for improving harmful laws and procedures.

- 3. Ensuring the sustainability of our own organizations.** We need to make sure that our organizations are equipped with the necessary human, financial and administrative resources to keep going until all children are fine. We cannot disappear because for many of 'our' children we are the last hope. But we have a huge problem. In the business field when a company develops a product that delivers a good service to the population and, on top of that, works with the government to bring that fantastic service to all those who need it... bingo! You solved the sustainability problem of your company. People or the government will pay for that service, you will accrue profit and then you will invest part of that profit to improve that service so that people will continue to buy your service and so on. You are sustainable as long as you can be relevant for your clients and are able to outsmart your competition. Well, this is not the case for us. Our services are badly needed but we cannot charge our 'clients' for them. Our 'clients' cannot pay and our governments are not willing to pay. When we ask them to do it, they will tell us about the economic crisis and the budgetary constraints. So we are left with a sustainability problem. We write project proposals, we organize fundraising events, we recruit volunteers and so on.

How can ChildPact be relevant for you? What could we achieve by working together? ChildPact is in the business of help child protection networks grow stronger. Why would you be interested in stronger networks? What's in it for you? And isn't it dangerous for your individual NGOs to allow for the Child Protection Network to become a strong network? I will say NO and I will argue that we have a joint interest. We should work together to strengthen the networks and here is why – back to the three main points of interest:

- 1. Delivering services.** A strong network is a place where people know and help each other. We can share information and refer cases to each other. We can create a network of resources around each individual child that we work with and for. We can learn from each other and here is where ChildPact also comes in. We want this learning to be regional. We want organizations from Armenia to be able to learn from organizations from other countries and for Armenia to share its experience in the region. Recently an Armenian delegation came to Romania to share and learn – I understand that this was

very helpful with immediate changes of public discourse. In child protection we still have a legacy of the communist past in this region. Every country in this region found its own way to deal with this legacy and in strong networks we can accelerate the pace of learning about what works and about what does not. This is why ChildPact advocate for the establishment of a [regional cooperation mechanism](#) for child protection to help not only CSOs, but also the governments, to exchange experience and learn together.

- 2. Advocating for better policies for children.** ChildPact is now building a very innovative instrument, the [Child Protection Index](#), to show how governments respect their UNCRC promises in the field of child protection. It is an independent instrument to show gaps and achievements in a very intuitive way. We have developed a list of 500 indicators and a methodology to score them. Each indicator will receive a score and the 500 scores will be combined in final score. The Index is now being piloted in 5 different countries (Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria, Serbia and Georgia) and it will arrive in Armenia too as soon as we will secure funding. For the index to achieve its aim we need strong coalitions. It is possible for the index to show realities that other stake-holders may not enthusiastically agree with. Some will want us to be less blunt. And even internally, we may have different opinions about one indicator or a score. A strong network is required during such times. And the members of the coalition need to have enough trust in each other as to negotiate internal differences.
- 3. Sustainability.** At ChildPact we identified many reasons why CSO sustainability is such a big issue in our region. I would only like to mention one: our organizations and missions not being visible enough to the general public, to decision-makers and to donors. Our organizations and missions are not visible enough because child protection in general is not visible enough. It is a daunting task for any organization working alone to raise the awareness of child rights issues to the extent that will make the money flow in our direction. I believe that there is no shortage of money. I do not know a single person who is not touched by children who suffer. We all have children that we love deeply so that we can all connect naturally to children in need. The question is how we transform this natural capital of sympathy in resources for us. How can we channel this into services that matter? We see people who give a coin to the children living in the street. But will that coin help or keep the child in his begging situation? What if a group of well-meaning people who want to give a coin do it regularly and keep that child in school. I am part of such a group and we help a child who has various members of his family in jail. So how do we encourage more people to do this? I think we need to embark on a massive program of visibility enhancement. And I think we can only achieve the massive change that is needed by working together. No one organization working alone can do

it. The small organizations will not have the force, while the big ones will be resented if they do it alone. It will be considered a mere fund-raising exercise and will reduce the value of the initiative. People do not want to feel that they fill the 'pockets' of NGOs. They do want to help, but first they need to be told that the problems are and what the solutions are. We need to organize a massive show of problems and solutions. Money is there. It just goes to other causes because other causes are better represented. I challenge you to find out how much money from the public authorities go to sports associations and electoral actions disguised as 'cultural' events. You will be shocked. ChildPact is ready to embark on such a visibility 'attack'. We have developed several project proposals that will provide the seed resources. We are confident that we will be able to identify the necessary resources for this. But we cannot do it alone. We need strong members who dare dream big and are not consumed by irrelevant internal conversations. At ChildPact we think big. We identified that one of the main causes for the slow pace of child protection reforms is the lack of strong networks. We think it is absurd that donors require systemic change for their investments but do not invest in those who can produce it: the networks. We think that the funding rules need to be changed so that we have recently launched a [Manifesto](#) requiring donors to create a trust fund for child protection networks. We are ambitious and we know that we will make it. There are similar trust funds (ex. Robert Carr Fund for HIV response).

Thank you for listening. I hope that I managed to show that our efforts in service delivery, advocacy and for ensuring the sustainability of our organizations can be better achieved by means of a united network. Actually, I am afraid I have preached to the convinced, but I think it is good to remember why we are here today. Also I hope I managed to illustrate why ChildPact is relevant to your work and what we can achieve together. There are many other things that ChildPact is doing and plans to do in the future, but for more I invite you to visit our webpage, like our facebook page, follow us on twitter or subscribe to our newsletter.