

FOREWORD



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Every minute... every hour... in Uruguay and in the rest of the world, we are facing violent situations, either as aggressors or as victims and/or observers.

As a member of the Board of the Governing Body on Policies for Children and Adolescents in Uruguay (INAME), and concerned about the subject, along with fellow Board Member, Prof. Julio C. Saettone, and onetime President Mr. Alejandro Bonasso, we convened specialists on the subject to try and delve deeper into the causes of this phenomenon. We know that these causes are multiple and similar throughout our Hemisphere, although each country has its own particularities given its social, political, economic, and cultural reality.

We are aware of the role and influence of the mass media, the families and the peers of these aggressive and/or violent children and adolescents; in sum, the entire community.

We truly believe that **prevention** is the only valid strategy to eliminate this aggressiveness and violence that hits and shakes us. A person is violent because it is often the only form of expression that he or she has learned in life, and therefore it constitutes a survival strategy. It is used as a daily practice, as a possible choice, as a social tool in the face of the attitudes of our fellow human beings.

And we wonder... and I wonder: Why is there so much violence? What causes it? There are many answers, including the following: a) unsatisfied basic needs, marginality and social exclusion; b) dictatorial family background; c) resorting to suicide as the only way out of an unfavorable and/or disagreeable situation (in all of Latin America, Uruguay is the country with the highest rate of this kind of underhanded violence); d) the licit or illicit use of drugs (such as drugs, alcohol or tobacco), are somehow associated with the genesis of violence, from the user to the environment and from the environment to the user; and e) television, or more specifically television programming. What children and adolescents have seen and understood will be incorporated into their future behavior; they are often alone when watching television, where they see murder, rape, kidnapping, fights, diverse arguments, and various abusive situations, with a strong connotation of implicit violence, without any guidance or supervision by responsible adults. This makes the child act first in an imitation of adults, and then, progressively, getting used to and repeating this praxis as something normal, to be done every day.

Physical, sexual and psychological-emotional family violence are other contributing causes that force all of us to action, since our fundamental duty is to create a group mentality in favor of peace and ultimately against violence.

We may arrive at peace through fostering the creation of an "education in values," since this kind of non-formal education does not mean to impose, but rather to propose various paths, so that the individual may have the chance to freely and democratically choose his or her goals for the future.

Therefore, we must help our children and adolescents gain the ability to make choices in a society such as ours, where the individual is constantly confronted with overpowering transformations propelled by economics and technology, which are changing human relationships, and therefore social relationships, in both the public and private spheres.

Since society is a dynamic construction, and School is an agent of social transformation, some of these **answers should be found in the education system**, which is the system that shapes men and women with a set of values and attitudes based on an autonomous and independent personality.

Only in this way will we have more conscientious, active, competitive citizens. Although their social and economic environments are changing constantly, we will also achieve a society of greater solidarity and fairness.

We must work towards this goal, based on local development, promoting social and community support networks in both state organizations and organized civil society, interacting between them and ensuring their rights and duties, compliance with which the international community – and our country – promotes and morally urges.

In this way, we could achieve a society of peace and harmony, where violence and/or aggressiveness would not pervade, nor seize human beings at each and every stage of the vital cycle.

For all the reasons stated above, the National Institute of Minors (INAME) has helped to make the presentations included in this publication, transmitting the responses that took place at the Consultation Seminar, which we are now openly making available to the countries of the region, as a necessary contribution to the physical, moral, spiritual and social growth of our children and adolescents.

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