The Kingdom of Morocco has taken many important steps to realise the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and to meet international standards of adequate protection for children. However, a concern has persisted amongst practitioners and professionals working with children in Morocco that the national child protection strategy is not working effectively at the level where children need it most; in schools, in social centres, in the home and on the street.

In response to this concern, the Moroccan Children’s Trust and their Moroccan partners, Groupe Maroc Horizons, held the first provincial Child Protection Conference in Taroudannt province, southern Morocco. The conference brought together government representatives from the Ministries of Health and Education, as well as police, teachers, social workers and civil society organisations working in the area of child protection. The goal was to initiate dialogue between these parties to achieve inter-disciplinary cooperation in order to better prevent and react to child protection issues.

The conference, entitled “A Different Path: Child Protection” took place on Saturday 11th May at the University of Taroudannt. The aims of the conference were firstly to share information and data, both qualitative and quantitative, on the extent of the problem of child abuse. Secondly it aimed to create a local strategy, in partnership with social institutions, to combat violence against children through enhancing the responsibilities of local actors. The conference took the following format:
Programme

08:30-09:15 Welcome

09:15 Opening speech by Mr Abdellah Soussi, President of Groupe Maroc Horizons.

09:25 Exchange of perspectives on the state of child protection in Morocco:

- “Juvenile Delinquency” by Mr Abseddamad Dafir, Representative of the Procurer.
- “Kafala” (Islamic adoption) by Mr Wahbi Laklayii, Family Judge.
- “Abuse in Education Establishments” by Mr Ibrahim Idardar, Representative of the Ministry of Education.
- “Abuse and Social Centres” by Mr Hicham Fethallah, Representative of the National Welfare Office (Entraide Nationale).
- “Physical and Sexual Abuse” by Mr Jamaa Ladam, Representative of the Ministry of Health.
- “The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and child protection issues in the United Kingdom” by Dr Christopher Hands, Director of the Moroccan Children’s Trust.

10:45-11:30 Discussion on cooperation between different groups working in child protection.

11:30-12:00 Coffee break

12:00-14:00 Breakout into three workshops:

- Workshop 1: “Child protection in education establishments”, facilitated by Mr Ahmed Chihab of the Ministry of Education.
- Workshop 2: “Child protection in social centres”, facilitated by Mr Hicham Fethallah, Representative of the National Welfare Office (Entraide Nationale).
- Workshop 3: “Child protection in the home and on the street”, facilitated by Mr Wahbi Laklayii, Family Judge.

14:15-15:00 Lunch

15:00-17:30 Presentation of ideas by each workshop followed by discussion.

17:30 Closing remarks by Mr Abdellah Soussi, President of Groupe Maroc Horizons.
Recommendations

As a result of the conference, the following recommendations have been identified by Groupe Maroc Horizons and the Moroccan Children’s Trust, and have been endorsed by the participants of the conference.

1. To establish a provincial child protection committee in Taroudannt province, with the ability to act in emergencies.
2. To establish a child protection committee in each school, to consist of professionals across all services in contact with children, including health, social and security.
3. To establish counselling centres for children in every school.
4. To establish specialised training for working with street-connected children and their families, and to safeguard the work of social assistants in this sector.
5. To establish an education programme on street-connected children for teachers and families.
6. To establish an education programme for children to make them aware of their rights.
7. To establish a point of contact (telephone number) which children can call when they have been victims of abuse.
8. To develop the Kafala system in order to respond to the real needs of street children.

In order to build on the success of the Child Protection Conference and commitment of the participants to build stronger links between organisations working with children, the Moroccan Children’s Trust has issued a questionnaire to all attendees. MCT expect to gather information to better understand the priorities of practitioners and their concerns over gaps in the protection of children from abuse and neglect.

MCT is in the process of writing a report to address the key recommendations from the conference, to give examples of best practice of child protection mechanisms from an international perspective, and to make policy recommendations.