



Building a child-friendly Europe – turning a vision into reality

**Conference on the Council of Europe Strategy
for the Rights of the Child 2012-15**

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**Theme: The UN Study on Violence against children and the role
of the Council of Europe in eradicating all forms of violence
against children**

**Building a child-friendly Europe: extending the achievements
Protecting children from all forms of violence**

Your Royal Highness, colleagues and friends,

I am so pleased to be able to be with you, with so many dear friends and passionate advocates for the rights of children. We are here to share in the achievements of the innovative path that the Council of Europe set out on when it launched its Programme “Building a Europe for and with Children” in 2006, here in Monaco. More important, we are here to urge the Council and its 47 member states to build on the achievements and move nearer to creating a Europe in which children’s rights have reality – are in truth enjoyed by Europe’s 150 million children.

2006 was also the year when I delivered the report of the first comprehensive UN study on violence against children to the UN General Assembly, on behalf of the Secretary General.

From the beginning of the Study process, and in the vital follow-up, the Council of Europe has been a leading partner and my dear friend Maud and her colleagues an inspiration indeed. As Maud has set out, the Council has supported regional consultations, developed new Conventions and Guidelines, innovative reports and materials that add essential detail to the foundation for all our work – which is the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Study was the first large-scale UN exercise to attempt to engage children seriously in its work – and here too the Council is showing how an inter-governmental organization can promote and practice children’s participation, a process with huge potential for adults’ education.

The work of the Council is not only of importance to Europe’s children. It is proving an inspiration to inter-governmental organizations in other regions. My colleague Marta Santos Pais, the Special Representative of the Secretary General, following up the UN Study recommendations, hosted a round table in New York last month where Maud, representing the Council, was joined by inter-governmental organizations now working to end violence against children in other regions. Among them the League of Arab States and the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children: the South Asian Initiative – inspired by the Council – is launching a regional campaign for the prohibition and elimination of all corporal punishment... And that region includes one quarter of the world’s children.

My own country, Brazil, is near to becoming the first very large state – with 69 million children – to adopt a clear ban on all corporal punishment. Queen Silvia of Sweden, a Brazilian, has supported our campaign by promoting to our Government Sweden’s pioneering role, the first state to enact a ban, more than 30 years ago.

I dwell on this issue not simply because violence disguised as discipline is the most common form of violence faced by children. But because its lingering legality and social acceptance is still scarring so many childhoods and is so tragically symbolic of children’s low status in our societies. It was brave - but also entirely correct - for the Council’s transversal project to start with an explicit campaign for universal prohibition – and of course that campaign has to continue until the goal is achieved, alongside the “One in Five” campaign against sexual abuse and others of equal importance. I am glad to see them firmly embedded in Strategic Objective 2 of the Draft Strategy.

“Child-friendly” has become a common catch-phrase. It makes us as adults feel good to believe we are being child-friendly. But we must never allow governments to devalue the concept. For example, while there has been undeniable progress, 25 of the Council’s member states have still not prohibited all corporal punishment; some even have laws that explicitly allow “reasonable” assaults on children’s human dignity. This is an offensive nonsense. There is nothing reasonable, and certainly nothing friendly about hitting children, however we try to disguise it.

My current gruelling work as chair of the UN Commission of Inquiry into events in Syria brings me into close touch with man's – it is mostly man's – inhumanity to man, with its dreadful impact on women and children. I sincerely believe that our work, the Council's work, to end violent and humiliating treatment of children has vast potential for reducing rapidly the inhumanity in adult societies.

I have read with excitement the draft four-year Strategy. The development since 2008 of the Platform on the Rights of the Child is a great achievement and now there is the innovative and essential proposal for an expert Commission on the Rights of the Child. We all know that in reality, most children remain largely disempowered in our societies. Thus organisations, including large inter-governmental organizations like the Council, have to compensate visibly in their institutional structures for this disempowerment.

We must remember that what we are advocating for here is not some unrealistic Utopian dream for children. It will be achieved when governments fulfill the detailed obligations which they have voluntarily accepted in ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child. All Member States, and almost all states globally, have accepted the CRC. The recipe for creating a fully child-friendly Europe is the Convention, and it is compulsory. There is no a la carte menu. States cannot pick and choose which rights to confer on children.

That is why the Strategy is so correct in aiming to mainstream children's rights in the work of all the human rights mechanisms of the Council. The European Court, perhaps the strongest human rights mechanism in any region, has already made a powerful contribution to enforcement of children's rights.

And the Council's Human Rights Commissioner, my dear friend Thomas Hammarberg, sadly near the end of his term, has adopted an exemplary and often visionary approach to children's rights.

When I first saw the image which heads the papers for this meeting, it suggested to me children hiding in the bushes – although the children already look happy and a little conspiratorial. Let us hope that by the end of the next four years, Europe's children will feel that they can safely emerge from the bushes, walk tall and live their childhoods free from deliberate adult violence, their dignity and their views respected.

Thank you.