

**International conference “Combating violence against children:
from isolated actions to integrated strategies”**

24-25 May 2011, Kyiv, Ukraine

CLOSING SESSION

**Speech by Mr Alexander Vladychenko,
Director General for Social Cohesion**

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear experts, colleagues and friends,

It is a great honour for me to close this highly successful conference, which also – as it is rightly underlined in its condesins - happens to be the first major event under the first ever Ukrainian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers.

On behalf of the Council of Europe, I would like to reiterate our sincere thanks to the Ukrainian government for placing the rights of the child as the first priority of the Chairmanship’s agenda. We all agree that this was a first-rate thematic choice.

I should also like to thank the Ukrainian government, and particularly the Ukrainian State Service for Youth and Sports, for the excellent organisation of this event and for their warm hospitality while in Kyiv. Let me also congratulate all other partners who contributed to this major success: our friends from the UNICEF Regional office for CEE/CIS, UNICEF office in Kyiv and, last but not least, the Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we are standing at the very beginning of the second decade of the 21st century - the age marked by sweeping information and technological changes, which has altered almost every aspect of our everyday life and in particular the way we receive and impart information. Yet, in this seemingly enlightened and civilised information-rich age, Europe is still grappling to accept a self-evident truth: that children are not only our future but also our present, that they have dignity and rights, which we, as adults, are obliged to respect and promote, moving towards a culture of zéro tolerance to violence against children.

In recent years some extreme forms of violence against children, including sexual exploitation, child trafficking and the worst forms of child labour, have come to the spotlight. Not unnaturally there has been a wide consensus of condemnation; an international public outcry demanding action at global, regional and national levels. Despite this movement towards change, many children in Europe continue to be routinely exposed to physical, sexual and psychological violence in their homes and schools, in care and justice systems, in places of work and in their communities.

The Council of Europe has been promoting respect for the rights of the child since its very foundation and has further reinvigorated its action with the launching in 2006 of its programme "Building a Europe for and with children". During this conference, we have presented to you our tools and our approach, including most notably the Council of Europe Guidelines on Integrated Strategies for the Protection of Children from Violence, as well as our groundbreaking conventions and recommendations in this field.

I invite the hosting government of Ukraine and all countries present in this hall to take urgent and determined actions to prevent and eradicate violence against children and to proceed with implementing the important conclusions formulated as a result of this conference.

First and foremost, I invite those member States who have not yet done so, to adopt national integrated strategies for the Protection of Children from Violence. It is to be recalled that the Committee of Ministers recommendation on this issue is not just “a take it or leave it recommendation” but a strong political commitment which should be followed by deeds.

Furthermore, I invite you to actively participate in and to contribute to the development of the new Council of Europe Strategy on the Rights of the Child for 2012-2015. A series of consultations will be organised over the course of this year with the Network of Council of Europe Focal Points on the Rights of the Child and Violence against Children, which will culminate in a high-level multi-stakeholder debate in Monaco next November.

Let me congratulate you again on your important achievements during the past two days! Also warm thanks for the challenging, often heart-breaking but so important work that each one of you is carrying on to make our Europe truly friendly for children!

Kyiv

25 May 2011