



**Speech by Maud de Boer-Buquicchio
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**International conference
“National integrated strategies
to eliminate violence against children”**

Vienna, 20-21 May 2010

A violence free society: a huge construction challenge

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

Four years ago, we started in Monaco the process of ‘Building a Europe for and with Children’. At that time, we were as thrilled as any architect may be in front of a huge challenge. Since then, we have gone through several periods and styles.

We started with the Ancient Egypt period and came up with an “inverted pyramid”: a little team supporting the weight of the impressive wealth of good work delivered by many other people.

The “Ancient Greece period” followed with a Parthenon-like building: a series of very well aligned columns or teams creating a space for debate.

After the age of enlightenment and its dose of rationalism, I would say that we have reached now modern architecture with something like the Sydney Opera House. We have created an open, organic, visible and creative space for exchange.

We have made good progress and we are now closer to the famous Finnish architect Alvar Alto vision of modern architecture. For him, "Nothing is as dangerous in architecture as dealing with separated problems. If we split life into separated problems we split the possibilities to make good building art."

This is precisely the vision of the programme. And this is why we have proposed the organisation of this conference to you.

Elimination of specific forms of violence against children has been on the Council of Europe's agenda since its inception in 1949. However, it was only in 2005 that the **Warsaw Summit** identified the need for a more strategic and concerted approach to this phenomenon. As a result, the "Building a Europe for and with children" programme was launched in 2006 with a mandate to eradicate all forms of violence against children and to address its social, legal, health and educational aspects.

The Council of Europe has adopted a **two-track approach to violence** against children:

First and foremost, the programme supports the adoption and implementation of **comprehensive national strategies for the protection of children from violence**. In 2009, the Committee of Ministers adopted the Council of Europe Policy Guidelines aimed to assist member states in developing integrated national strategies on the rights of the child and in eliminating violence against children. This new recommendation covers issues, such as legislative, policy and institutional frameworks, child-friendly services, violence reporting mechanisms and builds a culture of respect for children's rights. Thanks to the standards they contain and the participative process of their adoption, the Guidelines have already received wide support from both our European and international partners. They therefore represent the true foundation of this conference and will inform and guide its thematic sessions. You will have a more detailed presentation on the Guidelines later today as well as on the way in which they can inspire further work in the Council of Europe in order to take concrete measures to tackle existing violence against children.

Secondly, this programme has developed legal instruments and methodologies to address **specific types of violence or settings** where violence against children occurs.

In order to eliminate violent discipline, the CoE launched in June 2008 a **pan-European campaign "Raise your hand against smacking!"**.

21 European countries have already completely prohibited corporal punishment of children (including at home) and we have good hope that 6 other countries will do the same soon. However, the emotional debate that our call for a ban has generated in countries such as France or the United Kingdom shows that, important as it is, the human rights argument does not move everybody. We must keep insisting in the need to raise awareness and support parents.

On July 1st 2010, a breakthrough legal instrument – the **CoE Convention on the protection of children against sexual abuse and sexual exploitation** – will enter into force. Its uniqueness lies within a coordinated approach to violence and a multidisciplinary nature of the protection and enforcement of the rights of the victims. It is not only the legal reform that countries commit to when ratifying this treaty, but also the creation of co-operation mechanisms, the development of education, health and social services and policies, the re-definition of the role of child-protection institutions, a commitment to work with the business community and the media and to launch awareness raising campaigns and training programmes.

To support the ratification of this convention, the Council of Europe will launch its **campaign to stop sexual violence against children** on 29 November in Rome. The campaign's overall objective will be to raise European societies' awareness of the full extent of sexual violence against children and to equip children, parents and professionals with knowledge and tools to prevent and to respond to sexual violence.

In addition, we have been very active and creative combating violence in cyberspace and schools.

As the very title of the Programme shows, we are committed to build Europe **WITH** children. We have therefore invested in promoting child participation at a national level and in integrating the child participation dimension in almost all the activities currently carried out by the Council of Europe. We have developed material to raise awareness on children's rights in general and on the rights of children in care in particular and we have developed tools for human rights education. We have also launched projects aiming at promoting child-friendly services in the social, justice and health fields.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The results I just mentioned are not disconnected products in an on-line catalogue. They are the various components of a very complete toolbox that we put at the disposal of anyone wishing to participate in the most dignifying and rewarding of all constructions challenge: a building holding a violence-free and rights-based society.

In 2006, the **UN Secretary General's Report on Violence against Children** represented a milestone for national and international child-protection community since it gave the first comprehensive, global analysis of the different settings where violence against children occurs and put forward a set of recommendations for individual countries and the international community at large.

The Council of Europe supported the process leading to the Study's elaboration co-organising **a Regional Consultation for Europe and Central Asia** in Slovenia aimed at capturing regional perspectives and helping shape the Study's future content;

The UNSG Study contained **three time-bound recommendations**:

- **FIRST**: all states were asked to develop, by 2007, a multifaceted national strategy, policy or plan of action on violence against children, including the appointment of a focal point, preferably at ministerial level;
- **SECOND**: all states were urged to prohibit, by 2009, all forms of violence against children, in all settings, including all corporal punishment and harmful traditional practices;
- **AND THIRD**: all states had to initiate, by 2009, a process of developing a reliable national data-collection on violence against children.

Four years after the publication of the Study, this conference's programme mirrors the aforementioned time-bound targets. Although certain positive trends have been recorded in all parts of the world, effective prevention and response to violence against children remains a major challenge, and still far beyond reach.

The **objectives of this conference** are therefore to:

- share the initiatives of the Council of Europe with partners from other parts of the globe;
- consider what contributions national and international partners can make – collectively and individually - to build momentum and speed/support progress globally and regionally;
- define obstacles and the ways of overcoming them; and
- exchange ideas, good practices and plans of action.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our history of architecture could have stopped at the Neolithic era without the help of charismatic, creative and committed architects. We have in this room the kind of artists who are ready to take any challenge for children's rights, including crossing mountains, oceans and volcano ashes clouds. My gratitude goes in particular:

- to Marta Santos Pais for her friendship, her availability, her diplomatic skills and deep knowledge of children's rights. Much of the work we are presenting here today is the result of her personal investment. I hope we can support her mandate as much she is supporting ours;
- to Paulo Pinheiro, for his vision and the impressive result of his efforts, for his networking capacity, the incredible legacy he left and the energy he still invests in his always deeply humane missions;

- to Idalia Moniz, for her commitment to children's rights and her ability to transform political promises into realities, for her support to the Council of Europe and the relief she brings us proving the effectiveness and usefulness of our work!
- to Peter Newell for his encyclopedic knowledge of children's rights, his activism, his capacity to connect people (without interference) and readiness to help always;
- to the ministers, secretaries of state and all the experts who took the time to travel here, to read our papers (hopefully!), to prepare for the debates that will follow and who wish to contribute to improve our collective design;
- my admiration, solidarity and support to those of you who work in extremely difficult contexts, saving children from armed conflicts, starvation, slavery and indifference. Your building blocks are particularly heavy and difficult to move, but how necessary!
- and of course, my deep gratitude to our host, the Austrian Secretary of State of Economy, Family and Youth. For the your team's complicity and professionalism, for your political support and hospitality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

Our past and on-going work has demonstrated that concerted actions can be effective in building societies where violence has less and less space to develop. The Council of Europe Guidelines on Integrated National Strategies against Violence can be used both as a model and catalyst of change in Europe and in other parts of the world. They are the design leaving the drawing table to guide the actual construction work. This conference is also a great opportunity for us to learn from the experience of our partners from around the globe. It is only together that we can move the UN Study agenda forward and offer our children a present and future free from violence.

The history of architecture proves that it is the magnitude of the challenge that triggers the biggest progress and evolutions. Let's keep creating, reassembling, evolving, planning, inspiring, improving, involving and, of course, enjoying. As the Austrian master of unconventional architecture Hundertwasser once said: "When we dream alone it is only a dream, but when many dream together it is the beginning of a new reality".

Thank you very much for your attention.