Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Minutes

of the 8th meeting of the Network of Contact Parliamentarians to stop sexual violence against children held in Strasbourg on Wednesday, 27 June 2012 from 2 to 3.30 pm on: “Young sex offenders and children with sexual behaviour problems”

Opening of the meeting by the Chairperson of the Committee

The Chairperson, Ms Maury Pasquier, welcomed participants and the three new members of the network (Ms Darina Gabándiová, Mr Igor Kolman and Ms Mirosława Nykiel, contact parliamentarians for the Slovak Republic, Croatia and Poland, respectively), and thanked the experts for coming. She particularly wished to thank the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms de Boer-Buquicchio, who participated for the last time in the network meeting in her current function before she retired. She expressed her appreciation for her dedication and support.

The Chairperson informed the participants about the good practices of the campaign:

- There are 46 contact parliamentarians at present.
- The 6th newsletter has just been published.

Exchange on good practice

Ms Fataliyeva, contact parliamentarian for Azerbaijan, reported on the progress made in the campaign in her country, where psychologists had been enlisted and meetings held in schools. The aim was to consider how best to respond in situations involving sexual abuse and to be able to discuss the subject with children. Training had also been given to police officers. Ms Fataliyeva mentioned the problems involved in developing an open-minded attitude towards the theme of the campaign, saying that, initially, police officers had been reluctant to talk about the subject. Particular attention had been given to the question of how to proceed within the framework of the campaign without causing psychological damage to the children concerned. Ms Fataliyeva ended by announcing that a website was to be set up.

The Chairperson welcomed the growing number of ratifications of the Lanzarote Convention. 19 member states had already ratified it, including most recently “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Portugal, Poland and Ukraine. She said that a fresh appeal for funds had been published in the 6th newsletter. Additional funds being vital, she urged participants to ask their national parliaments to support the appeal. Lastly, she commended Mr Mignon for his efforts in support of the campaign, especially in his own constituency.

* Declassified by the Committee on 7 September 2012.
Mr Mignon, President of the Parliamentary Assembly, thanked the Chairperson and the network. He said that the silence around this subject had to be broken and mentioned the difficulties encountered in this regard. He described the children’s parliament that he had set up in the town where he was mayor. Every year for the past nine years, all pupils in the last year of primary school had had the chance to act as junior MPs. This year the theme was “No to sexual abuse”. The children had looked at proposals for legislation on this subject. Also, two cases of sexual abuse had come to light thanks to the distribution of material relating to the meeting of the children’s parliament. Mr Mignon said that teachers had found it very difficult to broach this issue but that no subject should be taboo. The ONE in FIVE campaign was a credit to the Council of Europe.

The Chairperson thanked the President for his contribution and said the network meeting was an opportunity to share good practice and ideas.

Ms de Boer-Buquicchio specified that this was a truly political chapter of the Council of Europe’s work. She felt that more attention ought to be given to children’s rights: it was customary to talk about children’s rights as rights held and exercised by parents over their children. She herself believed in the idea that children should have rights of their own. Children’s rights, moreover, should be part and parcel of human rights.

She said she had sensed a change since the Warsaw summit in 2005: children’s rights had become an aspect of all Council of Europe initiatives. It was an approach based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. She was leaving, pleased and proud to have worked in this field. There was more work to be done, however, and she was confident that everyone would continue the efforts begun. She expressed her gratitude for the support she had received, especially when dealing with complex subjects. She also commended Mr Mignon on the work he had done in his constituency. She wanted to promote policies that protected the rights of offenders, saying that she saw no conflict between this and victims’ rights. Often offenders were themselves victims of sexual violence. The last aim that she wished to pursue was to create a child-friendly justice system.

She reminded participants that the campaign had been launched in 2010, and that one of the goals had been to democratise the subject. She mentioned the Kiko material, which had been translated into 29 languages including Romani, Catalan and Basque. She ended by drawing attention to the success of the ONE in FIVE campaign: 17 national campaigns had been launched, two years after the launch of the general campaign, and a further eight were pending. She emphasised the importance of communication and the need for tools to detect signs of sexual violence in children. The earlier we talked to children about their rights, the earlier we could protect them. Turning to another subject, she made the point that custodial sentences should be used only as a last resort among under-18s, with priority being given to reintegration and rehabilitation.

The Chairperson noted that, in choosing to focus on young sex offenders, the Network had wanted to examine a more psychological aspect, with the help of two psychologists:

- Mr Ólafur Örn Bragason, who worked with offenders, and
- Dr Peter Mosser, who specialised in the study of sexual behaviour problems and in work with child victims of sexual violence.

Statement by Mr Ólafur Örn Bragason, psychologist, Salarheil Psychological Services (Iceland)¹

Mr Bragason worked with under-18s with sexual behaviour problems. He had introduced treatments to reduce the risk of inappropriate behaviour, and to prevent it from recurring. He also provided consultation to parents. He pointed out that sex offenders were not a homogeneous group, and that numerous factors could be involved. In response to the question “Why treat?”, he explained that individuals who received treatment had been found to have a lower recidivism rate than those who did not. He said that some risk factors were more predictive than others, e.g. living in highly sexualised environments or in environments where sexuality was a taboo, a history of sexual abuse or maltreatment, etc. and that it was important to differentiate between:

- static factors, which could not be changed because they were “historical” facts and
- dynamic factors, which could be changed.

It was these dynamic factors that he was trying to influence. There were also what were called “protective factors” that helped to reduce the likelihood of inappropriate sexual behaviour, such as leisure activities or positive parental role models.

¹ PowerPoint presentation available on Extranet and on request from the committee secretariat.
Mr Bragason outlined the approach used in the treatment of young people with inappropriate sexual behaviour, which was based largely on the use of cognitive techniques. In most of the cases treated, the child was diagnosed as having some sort of behavioural, developmental or emotional problem, such as anger problems or Asperger syndrome. Parents could make a crucial contribution to the success of the treatment but to do that, they needed support.

Mr Bragason emphasised the importance of working with this group of minors with sexual behaviour problems in order to reduce the likelihood of further victimisation, and to give children tools that increased healthy sexuality and therefore their chances of leading a fulfilling life without putting others at risk.

Statement by Dr Peter Mosser, psychologist, kibs - contact, information and counselling centre for male victims of sexual violence in Munich (Germany)

Dr Mosser drew attention to the stigmatising nature of the original title of the meeting, which was “young sex offenders” and spoke of the need to find, in each language, a title that reflected the seriousness of the theme without creating stigma. He said it was not known exactly how many children were affected by sexual violence but that there was a growing awareness of the problem. According to Mr Mosser, one of the problems was knowing what constituted “normal”. What was abnormal? What was inappropriate? He addressed the issue of why “sexually aggressive” children acted that way and explained that there were various reasons: perhaps the children were themselves victims of sexual abuse or other types of maltreatment or had experienced a major life event such as divorce of parents or death of a loved one, etc. Another question raised was whether children with sexual behaviour problems were the “perpetrators of tomorrow”. His answer, based on empirical data, was “no”. It was important to be aware, however, that the opposite could also occur: children with sexual behaviour problems needed help. Otherwise they were liable to suffer lasting damage, particularly in terms of their sexuality (risk of becoming sexually aggressive). He went on to say that often sexual abuse occurred in the places one least suspected: families and residential institutions. One potential problem within families was sibling incest. On this subject, he drew particular attention to the problem of disclosure and, in some cases, lack of awareness. The effects of abuse committed among minors, i.e. by one child against another child, must never be underestimated. The consequences were the same, whatever the age of the perpetrator.

Dr Mosser called for immediate action, urging the institutional networks to act promptly to provide support for those who worked with child victims of sexual abuse. Treatment programmes should be tailored to the age of the children concerned as otherwise they could be harmful for the child.

Dr Mosser gave some broad guidelines:

- it was important to consider what constituted “normal” sexual behaviour, even though there was no single correct answer;
- it was essential to transcend taboos: disclosure was vital in order to put an end to the maltreatment of children;
- parental co-operation was of paramount importance;
- he underlined the importance of the legal aspect, saying there was a need to criminalise acts of sexual aggression;
- he called for immediate qualified intervention.

He wished to see:

- closer co-operation between researchers and practitioners;
- more information for parents and professionals who came into contact with children;
- the establishment of an institutional network of experts specialising in this area.

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2 PowerPoint presentation available on Extranet and on request from the committee secretariat.
**Discussion**

**The Chairperson** wondered about the meaning of the term “reunification”, as used by Mr Bragason. She also wondered whether there were sufficient financial resources available for the measures advocated by the two experts.

**Ms Bonet Perot** mentioned the behavioural problems related to difficulties experienced in the home, among close family members. She wondered what were the most appropriate measures that could be taken vis-à-vis parents in order to counter this causal connection.

**Ms Roseira** asked for a copy of the experts’ PowerPoint presentations. She said that the subject was a tricky one, and that more time was needed to discuss it. She recommended setting up a network of experts alongside the network of parliamentarians, so as to be able to compare and examine experiences.

**Ms Andersen** inquired about the likely consequences other than recidivism for youngsters who did not receive treatment. She asked where she could find guidelines to help distinguish normal behaviour from abnormal behaviour.

**Mr Marquet** subscribed to the view that there must be no taboos. He wondered whether there were any statistics on the percentage of perpetrators who had themselves been victims. He also wondered whether there was a link between mental health and sexual offending.

**Ms Kyriakides** wished to know whether children under the age of 15 were included in the register of sex offenders. She also wished to know how best to proceed in cases where abuse had occurred within the family. She put forward a proposal to introduce prevention programmes in institutions where there were children.

**Ms Blondin** inquired about the definition of a treatment session as mentioned by Mr Bragason, and more specifically what it entailed, how long it lasted and who was involved. She mentioned the case of child psychiatrists who themselves engaged in inappropriate sexual behaviour with children. She also noted that there had been cases of older pupils in primary school (6-year-olds) sexually abusing younger children (3-year-olds).

**Mr Dobbin** mentioned the problem of children accessing pornography and the unsuitable nature of sex education.

**Mr Hejira** doubted whether there was a single solution for all cases of inappropriate sexual behaviour. He was afraid that the media and more specifically the internet were contributing to the problem of sexual abuse. He asked whether sexual abuse was considered an illness that needed to be treated, and inquired about the length of the treatment required by victims.

**Response from the experts**

**Mr Bragason** defined “reunification” as bringing the abuser and victim together for a session where they were taught about normal behaviour. He said the sessions lasted about 15 minutes and sometimes involved parents or other experts. The role of the parents was especially important if the children were young. Without treatment, children would suffer and the behaviour in question was liable to recur. Finally, he said that in Iceland, there was no sex offenders’ register.

**Dr Mosser** regretted the lack of available resources for carrying out work in this area. He went on to say that early intervention reduced the risk of the child developing paedophile tendencies later in life. Parents must also be involved in the intervention, particularly if the child was young.

**The Chairperson** declared the meeting closed and thanked all the participants, in particular the experts. She invited everyone to take part in the traditional group photograph.
Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable

(List of presence / Liste de présence)

Wednesday 27 June 2012 / mercredi 27 juin 2012
Strasbourg

Chairperson / Présidente
Mme Liliane MAURY PASQUIER

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Special Guests / Invités Spéciaux

Ms / Mme Maud de BOER-BUQUICCHIO, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe / Secrétaire Générale adjointe du Conseil de l’Europe (accompanied by Mr Hallvard GORSETH / accompagnée par M. Hallvard GORSETH)

Mr / M. Jean-Claude MIGNON, President of the Assembly / Président de l’Assemblée (accompanied by Ms Bonnie THEOPHILOVA / accompagnée par Mme Bonnie THEOPHILOVA)

Dr / Dr. Peter MOSSER, Psychologist, kibs - contact, information and counselling centre for male victims of sexual violence in Munich (Germany) / Psychologue, kibs - bureau de contact, d’information et de conseil pour les victimes masculines de violence sexuelle à Munich (Allemagne)

Partners for Democracy / Partenaires pour la démocratie

Mr / M. Omar HEJIRA, House of Representatives of Morocco / Chambre des Représentants du Maroc

Permanent Representatives / Représentants permanents

Ms / Mme Ioana BUSUIOC, Romania / Roumanie

Mr / M. Alexey MURATOV, Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie

Ms / Mme Olena PETRENKO, Ukraine / Ukraine

Delegation Secretaries / Secrétaires de délégation

Mr / M. Sigrún Brynja EINARSDÓTTIR, Iceland / Islande

Ms / Mme Maria FAGERHOLM, Finland / Finlande

Ms / Mme Juana JABLÁN, Montenegro, Monténégro

Ms / Mme Ann-Sofi LINDENBAUM, Sweden / Suède

Ms / Mme Gabriella MARANGOU-d’AVERNAS, Cyprus / Chypre

Ms / Mme Ana MILHEIRIÇO, Portugal / Portugal

Mr / M. Razvan TANASE, Romania / Roumanie

Also present / Egalement présents

Ms / Mme Françoise FEREY, INGO, Soroptimist International / OING, Soroptimist International

Mr / M. David FIELDSSEND, CARE for Europe / CARE pour l’Europe

Mr / M. Anton SALESNY, Journalist, Austria / Journaliste, Autriche

Mr / M. Branko SOBAN, Journalist, Daily Delo, Slovenia / Journaliste, Daily Delo, Slovénie

Council of Europe / Conseil de l’Europe

Ms / Mme Nathalie BARGELLINI, Communication Division / Division de la communication

Mr / M. Alexander BARTLING, Congress of local and regional authorities, Coordination, Strategic Planning and Evaluation Unit / Congrès des pouvoirs locaux et régionaux, Unité de coordination, planification stratégique et évaluation

Ms / Mme Maria Theresa CARENG, Trainee, DG I - Human Rights and Rule of Law, Children’s Rights Division / stagiaire, DG I - Droits de l’Homme et Etat de Droit, Division des Droits des Enfants

Ms / Mme Silvia GRUNDMANN, Adviser, Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights / Conseiller, Bureau du Commissaire aux Droits de l’Homme

Ms / Mme Joanne HUNTING, Congress of local and regional authorities / Congrès des pouvoirs locaux et régionaux
régionaux
Ms / Mme Regina JENSDÓTTIR, Head of Division and Programme Co-ordinator, Children's Rights / Chef de Division et Coordinatrice du Programme, Droits des enfants
Ms / Mme François KEMPF, Adviser, Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights / Conseiller, Bureau du Commissaire aux droits de l'Homme
Ms / Mme Catherine LAHMEK, CCM Assistant, Archive correspondent, Secretariat of the Partial Agreement on the Council of Europe Development Bank / Assistante CCM, Correspondante archives, Secrétariat de l'accord partiel de la Banque de développement du Conseil de l'Europe
Ms / Mme Marja RUOTANEN, Director, DG1, Justice and Human Dignity Directorate / Directrice de la Direction de la Justice et de la Dignité Humaine, DG1
Ms / Mme Gioia SCAPPucci, Secretary to the Lanzarote Committee, Children's Rights Division, Justice and Human Dignity Directorate, DG I - Human Rights and Rule of Law / Secrétaire du Comité de Lanzarote, Division des Droits des Enfants, Direction de la Justice et de la Dignité Humaine, DG I - Droits de l'Homme et Etat de Droit
Mr / M. Nigel SMITH, Communication Directorate / Direction de la Communication
Ms / Mme Estelle STEINER, Communication Directorate / Direction de la Communication

Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly / Secrétariat de l’Assemblée parlementaire
Ms / Mme Anne GODFREY, Assistant, Bureau / Assistante, Bureau

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development / Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable
Ms / Mme Tanja KLEINSORGE, Head of the Secretariat / Chef du Secrétariat
Ms / Mme Maren LAMBRECHT-FEIGL, Secretary to the Committee / Secrétaire de la commission
Ms / Mme Aiste RAMANAUSKAITE, Secretary to the Committee / Secrétaire de la commission
Ms / Mme Jannick DEVAUX, Project Manager / Chef de projet
Ms / Mme Marie-Anne Menger, Administrative Assistant / Assistante administrative
Ms / Mme Prisca BARTHEL, Principal Assistant / Assistante principale
Ms / Mme Linda McIntosh, Assistant / Assistante
Ms / Mlle Melis ISIKLI, Trainee / Stagiaire
Ms / Mlle Marion GEORGEL, Trainee / Stagiaire