Parliaments united in combating sexual violence against children

Council of Europe ONE in FIVE Campaign to stop sexual violence against children

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United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

Sexual exploitation of children is a serious violation of their rights, which undermines their dignity and physical and mental integrity. Efforts to prevent and combat this transnational and multidimensional phenomenon have made significant progress, thanks to the commitment of almost all countries and thanks to the growing number of initiatives by the private and public sectors, NGOs and agencies (often working together) at international, regional and national level.

However, many children still fall victim to sexual exploitation all over the world. Some forms of exploitation such as child pornography via the Internet (“grooming”), the sale and trafficking of children for sexual purposes as well as sex tourism involving children, are on the increase. The reasons for this include children’s increasing vulnerability, the growing use of the Internet, increased travel, disparities between different countries’ legislation and the persistent demand from the sex industry.

Parliamentarians play a key role not only in drawing up, implementing and monitoring the legislation designed to protect children and guarantee their rights, but also in harmonising legislation and practices between countries. In this respect, I should like to congratulate the Parliamentary Assembly and the contact parliamentarians of the ONE in FIVE Campaign on their efforts to combat sexual violence against children.

It goes without saying that my mandate means that I am strongly committed to preventing and combating the sexual exploitation of children. Convinced that sexual exploitation of children is not inevitable, I wish to reiterate my vigorous support for the efforts of the parliamentarians. I remain willing to co-operate with them in any way with a view to protecting all children worldwide effectively and on a long-term basis.

Agenda

5th network meeting, 17 November 2011, Florence

The 5th meeting of the network of contact parliamentarians for the campaign to stop sexual violence against children will be held in Florence on 17 November 2011, followed by the meeting of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee on 18 November 2011.

This event is organised in co-operation with the UNICEF Innocenti Research Center in Florence and will take place in the Istituto degli Innocenti (an orphanage dating back to the XIVth century).

In this symbolic venue the parliamentarians will be invited to have an exchange of views and to reflect upon the issue of preventing sexual violence against children.

Website

Interviews, handbooks, newsletters, leaflets… Find all information about the parliamentary dimension of the campaign at the following address:

www.assembly.coe.int/oneinfive

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**Greece**

**Conference in Athens, 9 June 2011**

On the initiative of the contact parliamentarian for Greece, Michail Katrinis, the Greek delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Hellenic Institute of Child Health organised a conference in Athens on the protection of children against sexual abuse and exploitation.

The aims of the event were to:
- raise awareness and inform participants, notably children and parents;
- invite the political leaders to strengthen the Greek legislation.

Rodoula Zissi, Vice-President of the Greek Parliament, gave the inaugural speech of the conference, which gathered 500 participants, including the Deputy Minister of Education, parliamentarians, representatives of the municipalities of Attica and the region of Attica. During the conference, information documents of the Council of Europe campaign, translated into Greek, were handed out.

Three other events will take place in 2011 at regional level.

**Mexico**

**National forum in Mexico and regional fora**

In 2011, the Mexican Senate launched its parliamentary campaign to stop sexual violence against children. On the initiative of the Mexican Senator Martha Leticia Sosa Govea, contact parliamentarian for the campaign, four regional fora will take place between July and October 2011, followed by a national forum in the Mexican Senate on 4 November 2011.

The regional fora will gather representatives from the local and the federal governments, parliamentarians, magistrates and NGOs to reflect upon the preparation of effective legislation (at local and federal level) to fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, prostitution, pornography and “grooming”.

**News: 4th network meeting, Strasbourg**

**Debate on child sex tourism**

On 5 October 2011, the 4th meeting of the network of contact parliamentarians will discuss the issue of child sex tourism, followed by an exchange of views with Najat Maalla M’jid, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The exchange of views will be followed by an update on campaign activities with the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms Maud de Boer-Buquichio.

On the same day, Najat Maalla M’jid will address the Parliamentary Assembly’s plenary session during a joint debate on the report on combating child abuse images, presented by Agustín Conde Bajén (Spain, EPP/CD), and on the report on violent and extreme pornography against women, presented by Michal Stuligrosz (Poland, EPP/CD).

**Latest: 3rd network meeting, Strasbourg**

**Debate on “grooming” (solicitation of children through the Internet for sexual purposes)**

During the 3rd meeting of contact parliamentarians on 22 June 2011, in the presence of Maud de Boer-Buquichio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ulrika Rogland, Senior Public Prosecutor (Sweden), made a presentation on the criminalisation of “grooming” in Sweden.

She reported on a “grooming” case, which received significant media attention: the “Alexandra case”, involving a man who, under the pseudonym of Alexandra, contacted young girls on the Internet, and then abused them sexually.

This major case, which happened between 2005 and 2007, had led to a change in the Swedish legislation in 2009. Nevertheless, the new law on “grooming” did not have the expected impact and very few convictions had been pronounced. It seems particularly difficult to prove the sexual purpose of the meetings arranged by the offender. To fight against “grooming”, Ulrika Rogland recommends a more efficient detection of this type of criminal offence (including through phone tapping and interception of Internet communications) and advocates stronger legislation.