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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Editorial by Stella Kyriakides
Contact parliamentarian for Cyprus and General Rapporteur on Children

The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201, Lanzarote Convention) has become the banner for many Council of Europe member states in the battle to protect children from and to combat all forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation. The process of signing and ratifying the convention has raised awareness of this issue, which had been surrounded by silence, fear and stigmatisation. This silence placed children in an even more vulnerable position.

Cyprus, a signatory to the convention, is actively involved in the ONE in FIVE Campaign, in an effort to break the silence and give children the voice they did not have. Promoting the implementation of specific policies, adopting new legislation and enhancing the development of child-protection services, are only a small part of what needs to be done before ratification. In this respect, the ONE in FIVE Campaign will be reinforced in Cyprus in autumn 2013 in order to re-consolidate efforts and commitments and promote the meaningful ratification of the convention.

The ONE in FIVE Campaign provides the opportunity to focus on different facets of child sexual abuse: abuse within families, abuse involving perpetrators from outside the family and peer abuse. Peer abuse is possibly one of those less spoken about, but is one that may entail particularly adverse consequences and a higher risk of antisocial behaviour, as children may feel that they will be misunderstood by their parents and may keep silent for longer. If parliamentarians, and people in general, have a thorough understanding of different forms of abuse it will allow for more effectiveness in promoting the signing and ratification of the convention.

This is a campaign that is fundamental to promoting children’s rights; a campaign that will change the lives of children and therefore needs to be fully supported. It is a campaign for which we need to join hands, raise our voices and intensify efforts as child sexual abuse has no boundaries and must be combated effectively and collectively.
**News: 13th network meeting, Strasbourg**

**Debate on “Sexual abuse of children by their peers”**

The 13th meeting of the Network of contact parliamentarians to stop sexual violence against children will be held on 24 April 2013 during the second part-session of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly.

The debate will be introduced by Ruth Ennis, board member of YouAct and the co-ordinating affiliate of the Y-SAV (Youth Sexual Aggression and Victimization) project and Y-SAV and gender-based violence focused activities within YouAct (Ireland) and Franny Parren, advocacy officer at Rutgers WPF (Netherlands).

**Latest: 12th network meeting, Berlin**

**Contact parliamentarians in Berlin**

The 12th meeting of the Network of contact parliamentarians to stop sexual violence against children was held at the Bundestag in Berlin on 14 March 2013. The discussions focused on “national strategies to fight sexual violence against children”.

Valeriu Ghiletchi, first Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, opened the meeting in the presence of Markus Löning, German Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid, and Marlene Rupprecht, contact parliamentarian for Germany. Norbert Lammert, President of the German Bundestag, delivered a speech recalling the work of the Bundestag to stop sexual violence against children.

Hermann Kues, Parliamentary State Secretary to the German Federal Ministry for Family, the Elderly, Women and Youth, and Lydie Err, Mediator of Luxembourg, informed participants about national child-protection strategies and mechanisms.

Leda Koursoumba, Commissioner for Children’s Rights of Cyprus and Chairperson of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), Erika Georg-Monney, representative of German youth associations in the National Coalition for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Germany, and Matthias Katsch from the Victim support initiative Eckiger Tisch, spoke about the importance of close co-operation between different stakeholders for fighting sexual violence against children.

Finally, Klaus Beier, Doctor at the University Hospital Charité in Berlin and Bragi Guðbrandsson, Director General of the government agency for child protection (Iceland), presented the complementary action undertaken in the framework of national child-protection strategies.
Greece remains committed to combating sexual violence against children. At the network’s meeting in Berlin, Eleni Rapti, contact parliamentarian for Greece, outlined her country’s activities in this field. She wishes to make use of her personal experience and involvement in the field to build on the efforts of her predecessor, Michail Katrinis, by improving the flow of information to civil society. She suggested, among others, the following lines of action:

- creating a TV spot which could be broadcast by state and private media (TV, radio, Internet);
- drafting a memorandum of co-operation with the Ministry of Education and presenting it in schools to pupils, parents and teachers, while enlisting the help of relevant bodies to promote the message;
- providing information to citizens in public places (distribution of leaflets dealing with the issue of sexual violence against children);
- organising events and information meetings with the participation of scientists and organisations committed to combating sexual violence against children;
- creating a website to inform and educate citizens about the messages of the ONE in FIVE Campaign.

According to Eleni Rapti, prevention is the key to combating sexual violence against children. It is also necessary to establish an extended network of involved parties and ensure complete co-ordination between them.

Mexico

Mexican Senator Diva Hadamira Gastélum Bajo has made an official request to the Mexican Federal Government to sign the Lanzarote Convention.

NGO initiatives

During a meeting held on 11 March 2013 with the Child Rights Committee of the Parliament of Serbia, the Incest Trauma Centre in Belgrade presented its initiative on rescinding the statute of limitations as regards sex offences against children included in the criminal code. This initiative was adopted unanimously by the Child Rights Committee which took over the official role of proposer. On 8 April 2013, the parliament adopted this initiative. After the United Kingdom, the Republic of Serbia has become the second country in Europe where there is no statute of limitations for sex offences committed against children.
**Lanzarote Convention**

**Belgium and Lithuania**

By ratifying the convention on 8 March and 9 April 2013, Belgium and Lithuania have respectively become the 25th and 26th States Parties to the convention.

**Project partnership**

On 4 April 2013, a project partnership between the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and the A.G. Leventis Foundation in Cyprus was signed. This project involves pilot initiatives in Cyprus for three years in the framework of the ONE in FIVE Campaign.

**Agenda**

The network of contact parliamentarians will continue to meet in 2013:

- **June 2013 part-session**: 14th network meeting on “Child sexual abuse in sport”, Strasbourg.

**Website**

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

[www.assembly.coe.int/oneinfive](http://www.assembly.coe.int/oneinfive)

**Contact**

**Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**

Jannick Devaux
Project Manager
Tel: +33 (0)3 90 21 49 03
E-mail: paceoneinfive@coe.int / Fax: +33 (0)3 88 41 27 97