

Consultation with experts on the Role of International Cooperation in tackling Sexual Violence against Children

The International Rome Conference
promoting the Council of Europe Convention
on the Protection of Children against Sexual exploitation
and Sexual Abuse

Report
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A. Introduction

The Council of Europe Convention on sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children has, among its focuses, that of promoting international cooperation as a measure against the phenomenon.

States are called to coordinate their action internationally including Third States, which are not member of the Council as well. Such action is deemed necessary especially in relation with specific types of crimes that are characterized by transnational features.

Experts and practitioners from the development field were addressed to participate to the Conference held in Rome on 29-30 November 2012 to discuss international measures against child sexual abuse and exploitation.

The Conference was organized by the Italian Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Council of Europe, the Italian Department of Equal Opportunities and the Italian Ministry of Justice.

This report summarizes the contributions of participants who attended the Conference in 2012 and is based on:

- the information shared by speakers during the plenary sessions and
- the discussions which took place during three working groups.

This report highlights important elements that have emerged throughout the presentations and working groups identifying common traits and challenges while taking into account the diversity of the experiences presented. For the specificity of each presentation, the material is available on the Council of Europe website.

B. The Opening of the Meeting

Mr Philippe Boillat, Director General of Human Rights and Rule of Law, Council of Europe

Mr Boillat opened the event noting that two years had passed since the launching of the Council of Europe Campaign 'One in Five'. He reminded the audience of the fact that eradicating all forms of violence against children is a political priority of the Council of Europe and one that is shared by the Italian Government.

Mr Boillat underscored key aspects of the Council of Europe Convention against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, hereinafter referred to as the Lanzarote Convention. He noted that the Convention, which is the first international legal instrument criminalizing all forms of sexual violence against children, is based on the four Principles approach that brings forward innovative measures of:

- **prevention** through awareness raising programmes, education and trainings of professionals while requiring child participation
- **protection** of child victims through reporting mechanism and juridical measures that are child-sensitive
- **prosecution** to stop impunity of perpetrators; significantly with the establishment of the double endowment principle ensuring the prosecution of crimes committed abroad
- **promotion** of integrated international policies through a multidisciplinary approach to ensure, among other important aspects, that child victims are taken care of by all responsible parties.

Mr Boillat noted that 23 State Parties had already ratified the Convention. He congratulated the Italian Authorities for the recent signature of the ratification instrument and addressed an open invitation to member States of the Council of Europe, as well as not member States to sign the document. He furthermore, announced that the application of Morocco had been approved; the North African Monarchy, thus, becoming the first state not member of the Council of Europe to sign the Convention.

Appreciating the diversity of contributors present at the event, Mr Boillat underscored that the Conference provided a unique platform to watch over the implementation of the Convention. Participants' experience in performing programmes fighting sexual violence of children were crucial to understand how policies and laws may be effectively implemented and facilitate cooperation among States.

C. The Objectives of the Conference

How can International Cooperation contribute to the fight against sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children?

As stated by Article 38 of the Lanzarote Convention, coordinated action at international level to fight violence and children exploitation is fundamental for preventing and contrasting organized crime phenomena and take care of the victims.

In order to identify models of actions and critical areas relating to effective measures, representatives of international agencies, Member and Non Member States of the Council of Europe and representatives of civil society organizations particularly committed to the fight against sexual violence of children were invited to the Conference to share their experiences and knowledge on the phenomena.

The Conferences objectives were:

- presenting best practices in the area of international cooperation based on a multi-sector approach including the involvement of private sectors and civil society;
- exchanging information on good practices in the area of development cooperation aimed at creating and sharing a broad range of information focused on the specific topics of the Conference;
- identifying strategies and mechanisms able to increase the impact of the international cooperation in fighting against these criminal phenomena;
- identifying adequate strategies which allow to prevent and punish sexual exploitation and violence against children and which also implement standards suggested by the Council of Europe;
- informing on programmes and already existing agreements on protection of children and adolescents against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse at international level;
- informing on the adhesion status to Lanzarote Convention and on the progress of Council of Europe "One in Five" Campaign in order to promote the ratification of the Convention;
- disseminating information on issues and innovations introduced by the Lanzarote Convention.

The Conference was structured in four panels organized around geographical areas and three working groups focusing on specific themes of interest. The next sections of this report present the findings that came out of each working session.

D. Projects in Europe

The European Panel saw the participation of representatives from the Italian Equal Opportunity Department, ECPAT Italy, Terre des Hommes Italy, Paul Hastings and Save the Children.

In this panels a few issues and action areas were discussed. Concerning the protection of child victims of sexual abuse and exploitations, experts highlighted the need for:

- multidisciplinary approach of the team taking charge of the victims. Psychological, psychiatric care should be combined with education programmes sensitive to family laws and social care.
- Synergy between the private and public sectors in terms of the services provided to the victims and the people involved

The issue of sex tourism was addressed stressing that preventive, protective and prosecuting measures should be concerned with the root cause of the phenomenon which are:

- poverty – it is important to beware of the fact that prostitution is a lucrative activity highly appealing for poor family and children
- discrepancy between the status of the client and the victim
- lack of education
- lack of control, potential perpetrators travel with the mindset that they shall not be easily blamed for what they may do.

As far as poverty is concerned, it is important that programmes addressing sexual exploitation of children provide victims and their families with pragmatic income-generating alternatives.

Online child sexual abuse and exploitation was also addressed in this panel. It was noted that this type of abuse has two dimensions that should be identified and dealt with carefully:

- locally the abuse produces real victims that ought to be rescued and taken care of
- globally images and videos may circulate virtually thus amplifying the abuse.

In order to perform effective measures to tackle this phenomenon it is important that countries involved, which may be numerous as certain crimes cut across several borders, share:

- a common understanding of the phenomenon
- a harmonized legal framework.

Such common understanding necessitates knowledge on the peculiarities of online sexual abuse and the effects that images circulating on the Internet may have on the victims.

The harmonization of countries' legal framework sparked a reflection on Article 83 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union¹. It was noted that while trafficking and sexual abuse are provided with a basis for legal harmonization within the EU, other significant violations of human rights are not covered.

It was furthermore noticed, that Europe holds strategic importance for international development representing the number one donor in the world. NGO's advocacy strategies should offer EU institutions a wide overview shedding light on the niche of human rights violations that fail to be acknowledged.

¹ Article 83 of the Lisbon Treaty gives the European Parliament and Council power to establish sanctions with regards to areas of crimes. "These areas of crime are the following: terrorism, trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation of women and children, illicit drug trafficking, illicit arms trafficking, money laundering, corruption, counterfeiting of means of payment, computer crime and organised crime" (Article 83 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). Participants suggested that the areas of crime would be extended to all types of crime against humanity including sexual abuse.

E. Regional Programmes

The Regional programme spanned from Latin American to Asia encompassing good practices presented by UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, a Magistrate from the Central American Court of Justice in Nicaragua, the International Organization for Migration, the Chair of the Cambodian National Committee against Human Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation in Women and Children and the Scientific Investigations Division of the Italian Carabinieri.

A stimulating good practice was shared providing interesting cues on how to promote youth and children's participation in the design of awareness campaigns. It was highlighted that effective measures should take into account children and communities' points of view on the issue before they can transform it.

The audience was reminded of the need to establish good monitoring systems of data, which may reliably depict the phenomena of violence at a given place. Presenters stressed the need for:

- tailoring the project to the beneficiaries
- empowering local institutions to ensure sustainability.

As already mentioned in the European panels, it is important to acknowledge the economic appeal of trafficking and exploitative activities for children and families confronted with a lack of working opportunities in fast-growing populations.

Moreover, it was strongly felt that, while shortcuts may be tempting to intervene on the lot of fews, international development agencies should cooperate with local institutions and government. Although it may show results at a slower pace, such type of development work is more effective in the long-run.

With specific reference to fighting the organized crime behind exploitative activities, it was noted that criminals are intimidated by four factors:

- protective networks that share information efficiently
- assistance to the victims who are then empowered to identify their condition of abuse
- homogeneous legal structures
- protection agencies' knowledge of the phenomenon such as the psycho-pathologic traits motivating certain kinds of abuse.

F. Mediterranean Projects

This Panel brought together speakers from the following organizations working in Mediterranean basin: Himaya - pour l'innocence en danger from Lebanon, MoSA initiative Child Centered of the Italian Cooperation in Lebanon, the SALEM project in Morocco coordinated by the International Organization for Migration and the NCM Anti Human Trafficking Unit of Egypt.

The session started off with a question concerning the socio-cultural diversity in which programmes may unfold, across different countries or within a single multi-ethnic country. Can one policy effectively curb sexual violence phenomena rooted in culturally diverse contexts?

With reference to specific Northern African and middle eastern cultures, it was noted that sexuality and domestic violence are intimately connected with thorough traditionalism and taboos linked to kinship and family ties.

Stigmatization emerged as a key aspect for protection agencies to consider when dealing both with the legal structures but also people's mentality. This was deemed important when coordinating training activities for education programmes in schools, where sexuality is often approached in covert tones.

As far as migration leading to sexual exploitation is concerned, participants brought up interesting points. Sexual violence is a variable that relates to migration in a number of ways. Sexual abuse may be a triggering factor motivating people to leave, at the same time sexual exploitation can be the purpose of migration or an unwanted consequence of it.

The study of migration has revealed that certain migratory routes across specific countries are well known and recognizable. Taking that into account, presenters suggested that a transnational welfare system be put in place to prevent and protect migrants liable to sexual violence.

Transnational welfare would entail a system of services capable of detecting hardship conditions and intervene before children may embark on the migration routes. Local institutions were identified as the authorities that should be responsible for this type of proximity actions, which should provide, among other factors, psycho-social support to liable families.

It is within families, in fact, that the imagery of the 'elsewhere' is created and children begin to appreciate the idea of leaving to find means to support their families abroad.

Speakers highlighted the importance of placing children at the center of the activities performed, in terms of allowing them to actively participate to the processes affecting

them as well as making actors aware of child-centered procedures. Children's councils were regarded as effective platforms to give children a voice.

Once more, practitioners from the field underscored the importance of strengthening protection systems that may outlive development projects and ensure that international cooperation tools to fight against sexual violence on children be functional to a permanent safeguard of rights violations.

G. African Projects

Representatives of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, the National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons, the Senegalese Ministry of Women, Family, social Development and Women's Entrepreneurship and CISP presented during this session.

The experiences shared offered good examples of holistic approaches in terms of addressing the root causes of sexual violence coherently with the Lanzarote Convention four P's approach.

With regards to counteracting child trafficking for sexual purposes, the experiences presented showed how the synergy between the country of origin of the victims and the State where they become involved in sexual exploitation is crucial for fighting the phenomenon.

For such synergy to be achieved countries should look for common memorandum of understanding and the establishment of international networks of institutions and organizations committed to the issue.

It was noted that sexual violence is a multidimensional complex phenomenon requiring the involvement of the vast variety of stakeholders that may be involved. Significant, in that respect, was an experience that succeeded in stimulating a strong involvement of the local community as well as the institutions and private sectors.

Through the creation of shelters, programmes can provide platforms for people to meet and open a dialogue on the phenomenon that is affecting them. Eliciting this type of participation and awareness raising that goes with it, these types of action succeed in stimulating a very powerful tool against sexual violence: social control.

Social control can further be stimulated in schools, through the training of teachers with regards to detecting sexual violence and their capacity to act upon it. Empowering people working with children and communities where the phenomenon of sexual violence is detected are crucial elements determining the success of actions. However, the institutional support backing up this social awareness is deemed necessary.

Involving the private sector was seen, again, as an important resource both to raise awareness in a sector that can negatively affect the phenomena of abuse and exploitation as well as finding relevant financial revenues for projects' sustainability.

While local actions and communities involvement were identified as important variables determining the success of actions, national legal instruments were seen to play a key role for the implementation of international standards.

National plans emerged as important tools directing national priorities with regards to children's rights. International cooperation may influence such plans through advocacy actions that need to be tailored to the specific circumstances of each country.

It is crucial, in this respect, that donors may coordinate their priorities with the recipients of their funding rather than imposing areas of actions which may not be of top priority in a given place.

H. Working Group 1: International Agreements

Justice and human dignity: international agreements to enhance protection of children victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and to effectively prosecute offenders.

This working group approached the question *how can agreements be implemented?*, focusing of the gap between the legal corpus of international agreements on sexual violence against children and the difficult implementation that they encounter.

Firstly, participants to this group discussed the challenges relating to convicting people for crimes they have committed abroad, such as sex tourism. The main obstacles identified in this regard were:

- lack of evidence of the crime
- local system of the country where the crime is committed is weak in infrastructure and likely to be corrupted.

It was suggested that bilateral agreements such as the ones struck between the United States, Canada and Thailand and the Philippines could positively contribute to the kind of cooperation needed to gather such evidence.

Victims can be brought to the country of origin of the perpetrator to testify. Despite the costs of such procedure and the risk of victims' excessive involvement in trials, which may be lengthy, this should be an area of investment for member States committed to the fight of the phenomena.

However, it was also noted that local authorities should be strengthened to allow for investigations to be carried out in the place where the offense took place. Corruption and lack of infrastructures are important areas that should be tackled by international programmes in that respect.

The working group also tackled the issue of dealing with specific categories of victims posing additional challenges for the protection of their rights. Illegal immigrants and asylum seekers, for instance, may be victims of sexual violence but reluctant to bring out their claims fearing expulsion from the country. The system has to reach out to these children and be felt trustworthy by the victims.

In addition, children who have reached the age of sexual consent and are involved in sexual affairs with adults can be difficult to protect. When dealing with this type of victims, lawyers need to prove the use of coercion and violence and there might be a societal debate judging such proceedings.

Pornography issues came up in the work of this group as participants noted that children have virtually unlimited access to pornography, which used to be something people set out to find, but it is now becoming something that reaches people in their homes. The

worrying fact about children's access to pornography is that this might be the first type of sex education they receive.

Moreover, pornographic images circulating on the Internet are not only about sexual intercourse and nakedness but often times they portray violent scenes relating more closely resembling torture than sex. The question arises as to what are the effects on children? Some children have shown signs as the ones displayed by victims of sexual violence, while others have become violent themselves.

More generally, the third working group found that preventive and protective measures of international cooperation should always be closely intertwined as to support and complement their supposed scope of action.

I. Working Group 2: Development Programmes

Human rights: strategic approaches in preventing and combating sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children through development cooperation programmes.

The second working group focused its discussion on the effectiveness of development and cooperation programmes drawing attention to the financial crisis and the challenges it poses to the international development sector.

It was noted that in order to maximize the effects of the resources available and fruitfully invest in international cooperation, the evaluation of actions should be improved and extended. Through the improvement of the monitoring mechanisms, relevant actors may successfully identify the needs and potential of their targets and perform evidence based interventions aimed at mobilizing local capacities ensuring sustainability in the long run.

Participants pointed out that the reduction in resources available for international cooperation calls for a proper assessment and development of the people working in this sector. Human resources involved in international cooperation should be highly motivated and involved in the issue they work on as to be able to attract stakeholders' and donors' commitment.

Increasingly, NGO's should think of themselves as catalysts of different funding revenues. As resources decrease, the importance of local sustainability grows. NGO's role should focus on stimulating local response to specific issues.

The second working group also tackled two important questions: should international cooperation focus on specific issues or tackle the problem more generally? With specific reference to violence, should international actions focus on sexual exploitation or address the issue of child labor in general?

Participants stressed the value of addressing the general conditions which produce sexual exploitation. In order to reduce risk factors, actions should promote children's rights mainstreaming. At the same time, it was noted that certain categories require specific protection measures targeting specific phenomenon. Internally displaced children, but also disabled children, for instance, require specific projects.

The discussion in the working group led to the appreciation of a double track approach that may be specific and mainstream at the same time. International Cooperation should therefore manage to foster multi-agency approaches that may holistically approach the complex issue of sexual violence stimulating an active response at different levels.

J. Working Group 3: Communication Strategies

Promoting communication strategies and education policies through international cooperation to raise awareness on the right of children to be protected against sexual violence.

The Lanzarote Convention displays four articles mandating communication and education strategies which are recognized to be of crucial importance for the fight against sexual violence:

- Article 5 which mandates awareness raising of children's right to protection among people that have contact with children
- Article 6 which foresees education programmes for children to learn about the risks of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation
- Article 8 targeting the general public and the need to raise its awareness
- Article 9 that encourages children's participation in the development of relevant policies and the private sectors' involvement.

As the working group approached the critical question *how should awareness be raised?*, some interesting points emerged.

First of all, participants highlighted the need to establish the target group of communication strategies and tailor campaigns in a sensitive and effective manner. The importance of avoiding stigmatization of victims was reiterated and it was noted that, on the contrary, campaigns should strive to empower victims' self-perception.

Strategies to raise awareness of travelers were also discussed as people embarking on a journey do so with a specific mindset that requires communications to reach them in a certain way. Campaigns of this kind should not feel like an infringement of one's freedom.

Participants drew attention to a common challenge that hinders the investigations of crimes and is related to people's general lack of awareness, namely reporting mechanisms for witnesses of sexual violence. The general public often seems to lack the understanding of the kind of information investigative bodies need in order to prosecute a suspect. Awareness campaigns could be a useful tool to increase people's capacity to report testimonies, as cases of tourists reporting on other tourists' behavior demonstrated.

How are children to be approached and participate to communication campaigns? There was a wide consensus, among the group, that services should be in place at the same time that campaigns are being propelled. Children need to have a clear idea of who their safety net is. Public services should be known and easily approach, providing a welcoming and trusting atmosphere for the children who, being reached by a campaign, may find the courage to act on their situation of abuse.

Participants agreed that international cooperation contribution to the fight of sexual violence as far as communication strategies are concerned is most sustainable when it focuses on fostering local institutions' protection systems. Advocacy also emerged as an important international cooperation activity that can significantly contribute to the advancement of children's rights with regards to sexual violence.

An important issue that emerged in the working group was that, acknowledging the diversity of the contexts in which communication strategies may take place, it is necessary to identify the similarities and differences inherent to specific situations in order to meaningfully exchange good practices.

International Cooperation involves numerous and diverse contexts that correspond to different institutional and social levels of awareness with regards to phenomena of sexual violence against children. Mapping out such diversity of awareness can lead to an improved dialogue among States as well as more efficacious communication actions.

K. Results of the Conferences

The Conference offered an overview of a wide range of actions tackling sexual violence of children that were developed in different parts of the world. Presenters showed that considerable progress had been achieved by the international cooperation in the previous decade, while shedding light on the potential of international cooperation for present and future times.

It was noted that since the first world Congress of Stockholm governments' commitment to fight the phenomenon had grown dramatically as well as the knowledge, professional experiences, and methodologies in the field. These factors emerged as the core of the potential of international cooperation.

A significant finding of the Conference was that today's actions can rely on an increased support of the private sector, in particular companies operating in tourism and travel industry which have adopted the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.

While this progress is significant and noteworthy, participants expressed their concern about the scope of the problem which remains alarming as certain forms of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents are on the rise.

As recognized at the Third international congress of Rio against the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, governments face an increased vulnerability of children to sexual exploitation as a result of increasing poverty, social and gender inequality, discrimination, drug and alcohol abuse, ongoing demand for sex with children, environmental degradation, health problems, displacement, occupation, armed conflict and other emergencies.

At a time of financial and economic crisis, economic development, social development and environmental protection continued to emerge as the interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of the prevention of violence against children and their protection from each form of exploitation.

Participants to the Conference recognized in a child centered approach a common and golden rule, the implementation of which may determine whether cooperation programmes are going to effectively implement children's rights as their real mission and vision. Children are not only the beneficiaries of development actions, but they should be also considered as partners with their views and opinions to be taken seriously.

Children's participation is a cross-cutting approach that all Council of Europe initiatives embrace with the aim of promoting children's rights and the prevention of violence against children. It is also one of the fundamental principles of the Italian Development Cooperation Guidelines on Minors.

Eradication of poverty based on sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice were recognized to be the crucial contributions international cooperation provides to the implementation of children's rights and the fight of the root causes of child sexual exploitation.

Another issue that was raised several times during the Conference was the lack of reliable data on the phenomenon, a gap which is an obstacle to take evidence based decisions, to assess the outcomes of the projects and also to direct resources towards more effective actions. This statement calls for further clarification as it certainly holds true when considering quantitative data as that which can be the output of administrative activities in the health, social and judicial sectors.

However, there is a large amount of qualitative data gathered from clinical, social and educational work with children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. Qualitative data illustrates the needs of child victims as well as the short and long term effects of the abuse suffered. This type of evidence powerfully explains why authorities cannot stop to support prevention, protection and prosecution of crimes as stipulated by the Lanzarote Convention.

Here follow further elements that came out of the Rome Conference with regards to each of these principles and the contribution that international cooperation may give to their implementation.

Prevention

Participants to the Conference found that for preventive measures to be effective, they must take into account all the complex factors surrounding violence and improve the protection system of victims. Prevention asks for multidimensional actions addressing culture, societal norms, laws, organization of services, roles, functions and expertise of professionals.

It is important to ensure equal access of girls and boys to education, social and health care. Girls face multiple barriers to their empowerment because of cultural and social causes of discrimination which reinforce the risk of their sexual abuse and exploitation.

Taking the cultural dimension into account entails translating into policies and programmes the lessons learned by analyzing different cases. For example, the experiences presented at the Conference outlined both similarities and differences between the two forms of sexual violence against children, namely abuse and exploitation.

This is relevant for international cooperation because the specific characteristics of each form in terms of root causes, dynamics and criminal context calls for a different institutional response in spite of the fact that some cases may provide a scenario in which children suffer sexual abuse in the family at first and sexual exploitation in a second time.

The Conferences dwelled on the topic of Communication as a key factor for prevention. A challenge raised was how to use school and public authorities for a communication enhancing prevention. It was suggested that public authorities should go on the streets and make themselves easily available to children and families.

According to the ecological approach to the phenomenon, which depends on social, family and individual factors, programmes should address the root causes of sexual abuse and exploitation, including socio and economic challenges which produce poverty (including

new forms of poverty in European countries), social exclusion, lack of livelihoods and gender discrimination.

An important component of prevention is the promotion of the active participation of all relevant actors. International cooperation programmes effectiveness greatly benefit from the inclusion of children's participation, including victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

The presence of children's participation can be understood as quality criteria, which is not only stated by the Convention of the right of the Child, but is also key to the process of resilience in children victims of traumas. Participatory processes are effective means to empower people to deal with their emotions and gain control over their life. This is a goal of overwhelming importance for human beings that have been forced into powerless conditions.

It was agreed by participants that sharing knowledge and best practices is an important activity for the implementation of effective preventive measures. Databases for best practices and virtual desks storing the documentation and sharing of experiences should be created as important tools in this domain.

Protection

An array of factors fostering projection has been identified in resilient children. They are present at the individual, family, and community level and contribute as a whole to the child's recovery following traumas during childhood. In this set of factors, community support plays a crucial role. The international, national and local communities may become the so-called "tutor of resilience" as they may foster resilience in a number of ways. International cooperation programmes targeting protection should enhance protective and resilience conditions, which should begin before the child is born and continue into the person's adulthood.

Protection of child victims is part of the international development actions. Third countries, which can sign the Council of Europe's Convention, are often countries with high risk of sexual exploitation of children, partly caused by travelers from other countries. This picture requires international cooperation to raise awareness, mobilize resources and perform actions.

Protective measures are necessary for laws to be implemented and to provide child victims with a strong protection system in terms of services and resources in the short and the long term. Such task requires multisectorial cooperation as victims protection calls for psychological, physical, social and legal protection. It is important for cooperation programmes to avoid fragmentation of interventions and overlapping.

During the conference participants addressed the need to improve the coordination of donors and actors of cooperation, ONG and local partners, which is an ever more critical condition in times of financial crisis. The discussion, among others, has highlighted some significant operational components of protection:

- networks among relevant public and private actors,

- protocols of intervention to share common objectives, lines of actions and cultural values
- guidelines to address basic principles and priorities in international cooperation on children's rights
- identification of essential level of services in the international cooperation programmes.

Prosecution of crimes

Considering the transnational characteristics of certain types of sexual exploitation, international cooperation is essential to harmonize procedural strategies and training the personnel responsible for handling cases. Law enforcement and the prosecution of offenders is too often hampered by the lack of adequate resources, and appropriate training of professionals involved.

Impunity for perpetrators of sexual abuse and exploitation of children and adolescents is often perpetuated by the lack of investigation and prosecution of offenders in the country where the crime takes place, and the lack of necessary extradition regulations and mutual legal assistance agreements and practices.

Harmonization of laws was acknowledged as the fundamental requirement for an effective prosecution of crimes and international cooperation in the investigation phase and in the criminal proceedings.

Harmonization of laws is especially crucial when considering the gathering of the evidence of these crimes. Participants discussed how evidence can be best gathered: in the country where the crimes are committed or in the country where the offenders belong. There are financial challenges, on one hand, and feasibility concerns on the other.

The implementation of Lanzarote Convention is not zero cost, it requires adequate mobilization of resources at the national and international level as well as additional resources from all available funding mechanisms. It also calls for thorough evaluation and assessment procedures to ensure projects' accountability in partnership with the donors.

Concluding Remarks and Future Initiatives

Mr Terzi, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs

Mr Terzi illustrated the commitment of the Italian Government to the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. He cited the 1956 national law against child prostitution and the 1998 national law equating sexual exploitation to slavery. The Minister also mentioned the CRC Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the Recommendations of the Stockholm, Yokohama and Rio Conferences and the Lanzarote Convention recognizing the importance of these instruments to stimulate governments' commitment to end sexual violence of children.

Institutional commitment ought to go beyond national boundaries. Mr Terzi noted how defending children's rights is not only a moral imperative, but it means supporting poorer countries' democratic and sustainable development. Children's violations stem from poverty conditions and aggravate social problems, which is why they need to be tackled to allow the flourishing of future generations.

Mr Terzi drew attention to the peculiar contexts where children were particularly suffering at the time of the Conference. He mentioned the Syrian conflict, where children were suffering violence, mutilation and the effects of cluster bombs. While expressing solidarity to the victims of civil war in Syria, Mr Terzi stressed the need to offer political and economic assistance to those areas that are extremely hostile to childhood.

Ms Fornero, Italian Minister of Labor, Social Policies, and Equal Opportunities

Ms Fornero discussed some innovative tools that the Italian Government developed to support its activity against violence on children. With the support of the Equal Opportunity Department, a Committee coordinating ministries' work on the fight of pedophilia was established to reach political unity on issues concerning minors.

Moreover, a technical organism was created to support evidence based policies. This technical body acts as an observatory on pedophilia and pornography gathering and analyzing data on the phenomena. It is known that, due to the nature of the phenomenon, available data offers a limited picture, while the observatory will work to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The ministry cited documents concerning international cooperation against sexual violence of minors such as the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child the Chart of fundamental rights of the person of the European Union, the Lanzarote Convention and the European Directive of 13 December 2011. Ms Fornero stressed the importance of the Lanzarote Convention in fostering governments' commitment and mutual assistance to safeguard children's rights.

Ms Severino, Italian Minister of Justice

Ms Severino shared worrisome data on sexual violence on children citing two figures from the World Health Organization report of 2002: 150 millions of young girls and 73 millions of boys were forced into having sex. She noted that the phenomenon was understood to be on the rise.

Ms Severino highlighted how such data is likely under scaling the real numbers thus concealing the harshness of the real scenario. Reliable data is hindered by the fear of making claims, feelings of shame and the silence of family members.

The Minister noted that sexual violence is a violation of human rights, which are absolute and inalienable. She reminded the audience, that by being absolutes, rights cannot be adjusted to local needs.

Ms Severino stressed the importance of empowering institutions and the people working in them to transmit human rights values and awareness. She lamented victims and peoples' lack of trust in the institutions which undermines their capacity to make claims and denounce the violence.

Ms Severino drew attention to the ultimate goal of protective measures: rehabilitate the victim and empower them to go back to actively and peacefully participate in society. This ultimate goal requires qualified workers' commitment and support for victims to receive appropriate care before, during and after trials are carried out.

She noted that the Lanzarote Convention sets the framework for such work to be achieved and restore victims' dignity. She also pointed at the creation of international networks for a proper implementation of the Convention's preventive and prosecuting measures.

Ms Regina Jensdottir, Head of the Children's Rights Division and Coordination of the Programme "Building a Europe for and with Children", Council of Europe

Ms Jensdottir closed the conferences by appreciating the results of the two working days. She highlighted the importance of the lessons learned through the good practices presented among which the Italian Cooperation provided groundbreaking work examples setting the fight of sexual violence as a top priority.

Ms Jensdottir was appreciative of the projects conducted in countries not member of the Council of Europe such as Lebanon, Cambodia, Egypt, in Senegal among others. Through international cooperation actions, the Lanzarote Convention is being implemented there. This positive finding should encourage more states to sign and ratify the convention which is open to States not member of the Council of Europe.

It was remarked by Ms Jensdottir that the Lanzarote Convention is proving to be far reaching in geographical terms as well as in its scope of action. The comprehensive approach is showing great potential for legal and political transformations outside of the European Union as well. The good practices shared throughout the conference provided stimulating examples on the multidisciplinary and holistic approach needed to involve relevant institutions in the fight against sexual violence.

Ms Jensdottir concluded by stating that while there is strong agreement on the relevant legal documents and tools enhancing governments commitments to the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, such commitment should not stop at ratification but be followed up by the relevant policies for implementation.