

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

“THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN TACKLING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN”

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International Conference Hall

P.le della Farnesina, 1

Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Rome

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First of all, allow me to welcome the distinguished representatives of the Council of Europe, the Ministers and other Authorities from the Member States of the Council, all the national and international distinguished guests present here today and all the participants in this Conference, which I consider as an essential opportunity to exchange views and a central forum for discussion on the role of international cooperation in tackling all forms of sexual violence against children.

I would like to particularly thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosting the today's Conference, and in particular the Directorate General for Development Cooperation that, together with the Council of Europe, the Department for Equal Opportunities, the Ministry of Justice and the Istituto degli Innocenti in Florence, has undertaken the organization of this event.

Following the delegation of functions relating to equal opportunities and the protection of human rights by the President of the Council of Ministers, I was entrusted with the task of coordinating the Government's action to protect children from sexual abuse and sexual exploitation and combat child pornography, with the support of the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers. I am firmly convinced that, in order to properly perform such a delicate task, which is also related to the fundamental protection of individuals during their growth and development, it is necessary to integrate

national actions with guidance and incentives coming from the international context. In fact, in relation to cooperation, this context becomes not only a source of improvement for the Government's action, but also an area of intervention.

There is no doubt that international cooperation plays a central role in the implementation of preventive actions to protect children and combat sexual violence against them, since it is aimed at preventing child sexual abuse and exploitation from happening in the first place. Governments should take responsibility in this field, even more than in others: it is the same responsibility we all have, as adults, towards future generations and that we should necessarily take by implementing appropriate and cross-cutting policies based on cooperation, mutual support and solidarity between States.

Now more than ever, the protection of children requires a multi-level governance approach and response: the complex and serious nature of child sexual abuse and exploitation, the high number of victims and the regulatory implications suggest the adoption of shared and cross-cutting practices both at the national and international level.

In order to help sexually abused and exploited children, every country should develop adequate legislative measures allowing to effectively combat this phenomenon, especially through international cooperation actions.

Taking into consideration the most comprehensive international legal framework on this subject, reference should be made to several instruments such as the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and, with specific reference to sexual abuse and exploitation of children, the Lanzarote Convention - which was drawn up by the Council of Europe and that we all know very well – and the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography.

They all are fundamental regulatory instruments for the protection of children explicitly acknowledging children's rights and as well as the great importance of cooperation activities.

Since many years, Italy has adopted legislative measures and action mechanisms through which it has become one of the most advanced countries in relation to the European and international standards. In this regard, I would like to recall the C.I.C.Lo.Pe. Committee – the Interministerial Committee for the Coordination of the Fight against Paedophilia, that I chair and have recently re-established. This is a specific interministerial instrument aimed at ensuring the political and programmatic coordination of actions to be implemented throughout the country to prevent and combat all forms of violence against children.

Furthermore, the Observatory for the Fight against Paedophilia and Child Pornography is currently operating within the Department for Equal Opportunities. It is a technical body whose re-establishment I have strongly supported and in which the most active Institutions and Associations working in the field of prevention and fight against child sexual offences are represented. The Observatory will shortly create a system for the collection, processing and analysis of data concerning violence against children which will allow the adoption of increasingly informed and effective policies developed on the basis of a better knowledge of the phenomenon and needs for action.

In this regard, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight today the importance for all countries of establishing an increasingly effective political coordination, which is one of the central elements related to the numerous international commitments made by the Member States of the Council of Europe and renewed in the Lanzarote Convention.

With a view to encouraging this integration, it will be necessary to standardize legislations.

Such standardization will surely strengthen international cooperation and will be even more justified by the signature and ratification of the Lanzarote Convention.

On 1 October 2012 the Lanzarote Convention became a legally binding instrument also in Italy: in fact, Law No. 172 of 1 October 2012 was promulgated and entered into force on 23 October. The ratification of the Lanzarote Convention represents a fundamental step for our country and makes my presence here today – as a Minister of the Italian Republic – even more symbolic in relation to the deposit of the instrument of ratification through which Italy acquires the status of “State Party” to the Convention.

Countries ratifying the Convention are required to ensure the implementation of a comprehensive action to combat all sexual offences against children.

This instrument will influence the national legal system not only of all States having already signed and ratified it, but also that of those countries which will do it soon. Their **objective** is, on the one hand, to provide a “minimum degree” of protection established by criminal law and, on the other hand, to raise protection standards for child victims of such crimes.

In particular, the Convention requires State Parties to commit themselves to the protection of children, the prevention and fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, which involve the promotion of international cooperation activities. Art. 38 of the Lanzarote Convention introduces the obligation for State Parties to implement development cooperation programmes in countries presenting the highest risk of child sexual exploitation, with the aim of preventing and combating this phenomenon and its cross-border dimension. In this regard, allow me to stress the importance of strengthening police and judicial cooperation, as one of the main objectives to be achieved in this field.

Multi-level cooperation is therefore extremely significant in the text of the Convention and an essential factor for all those States which firmly believe in the importance of common action. In that light the Lanzarote Convention can be considered as a common goal which all the countries that have not ratified it yet should try to reach: adopting this important and innovative

international instrument and ensuring its full implementation means being ready to face future challenges and do it all together. This will lead to the effective application of art. 38 of the Convention while giving further substance to the principle of cooperation on sexual abuse of children among the Member States of the Council of Europe, which is the only means to combat this phenomenon.