

**Conference  
Preventing sexual abuse of children  
Madrid, 10-11 December 2013**

**Opening statement by Ms Marja Ruotanen  
Director of Justice and Human Dignity  
Council of Europe**

Minister,  
Excellences,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today it's Human Rights Day. I cannot imagine a better way to celebrate it than discussing children's human rights.

Sexual abuse and exploitation are blatant violations of human rights. It is estimated that one in five children in Europe are victims of some form of sexual violence.

What are we doing to prevent and combat sexual violence against children?

When looking at the situation, I have mixed feelings.

First, I am sad because today, millions of children suffer in silence. They are victims of taboos, trapped by feelings of fear, shame and guilt. This is a situation that should revolt and mobilise every single adult. This should be reflected in the priorities of all governments and parliaments. It should interest the media and mobilise the business sector - in particular the banking, tourism, leisure and the advertisement industries as well as the information and communications technologies sector. The prevention, detection and notification of sexual violence and the protection of its victims should be a clear objective for all professionals in the education, health, justice, youth, family and welfare sectors. All parents should be aware of the risks and be given the tools and support to minimize them. All children should feel empowered, know they can and should set limits and where to seek help. This is precisely one of the objectives of the Council of Europe ONE in FIVE Campaign to stop sexual violence against children.

I also feel reassured because the international community and many member states have achieved impressive progress in their fight against sexual abuse and exploitation. This progress is reflected in the increase in the number of countries having ratified two key international legal instruments:

At the global level, the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography today has been ratified by 166 states worldwide and signed by several others. It is becoming an important instrument of progress.

In Europe, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, also known as the Lanzarote Convention, counts 29 state Parties; it has been signed by 46 Council of Europe member States. It is open for accession by states not members of the Council of Europe, and it is already creating a lot of interest beyond Europe. The Lanzarote Convention is a relatively young Convention outlining with great detail the measures that need to be taken to prevent sexual violence including sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in the circle of trust, to protect the child victims, including the victim right to redress and compensation, and to end with the impunity of the offenders. These measures include the criminalisation of a series of offenses often absent from criminal codes such as grooming. The Convention's monitoring mechanism has just launched its 1st monitoring cycle focusing on the protection of children from sexual abuse in the circle of trust.

To align with this international legislative framework, countries have taken a number of crucial measures at the national level. Notably, by introducing important changes in their criminal codes so that all forms of sexual violence are duly criminalized, that perpetrators are brought to justice and that punishment is proportionate to the gravity of the offense.

Although this is indeed excellent news, very necessary and reassuring, I cannot avoid feeling impatient.

I feel impatient because still much needs to be done to move from "ONE in FIVE" to "NONE in FIVE". While countries are building more solid legal frameworks and better victim protection services, prevention strategies are still either poor or simply non-existent. And, as we all know, many, many abuse cases could be avoided if effective – and sometimes quite simple- prevention measures were taken.

I therefore welcome this Conference devoted to the prevention of sexual abuse of children that the Lanzarote Committee has prompted.

As you know, the objective of this Conference is to discuss ways to implement the prevention measures contained in the Lanzarote Convention. When preparing the various sessions and trying to identify good practices to illustrate them, the challenge ahead of us actually appeared bigger – rather than smaller. The reality is that most countries are struggling with a number of issues. One such issue is the introduction of sexuality education in the school curricula. Another challenge is helping parents to talk to their young children, or helping employers to make safer recruitment decisions or

offering intervention programmes to abusers and to individuals who fear that they may commit abuse.

I feel, however, confident that the experts gathered here, the debates in the various sessions and the exchange of good practices will help us to advance the cause of prevention. Our hope is that we leave Madrid with many interesting ideas and contacts but, above all, with the conviction that prevention is not the last measure to take, but the first and probably the most important.

So: I feel sad, reassured, impatient and confident. And, I also feel grateful.

I am grateful to the Spanish Government for hosting this event and having facilitated the exchange of good practices coming from Spain and the rest of Europe. Minister Gallardón, I am impressed by Spain's commitment to combat sexual violence against children through a number of important legislative changes and other measures. I believe that the Annual Justice and Children forum that you have promoted, Minister, is also a very good practice to share.

I am also grateful to CaixaForum for offering us this inspiring meeting space. And, of course, I am most grateful to all the experts gathered here. You have made the protection of children's rights and wellbeing a priority. As long as we have committed, competent and combative individuals as you on board, there will always be a reason to feel hopeful, inspired and stimulated.

I wish you all a fruitful Conference.