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“The impact of the Lanzarote Convention”

Dear participants,

One of the strengths of the Lanzarote Convention is that it does not operate in a vacuum. It was designed and remains a treaty that connects universal commitments (such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) to the action needed at regional and national level to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children.

The Lanzarote Convention is made in Europe but not meant for Europe only. It is open to accession by any State and is already inspiring policies and legislations worldwide. If used to its full potential, it can indeed make a world of difference.

I see two important avenues to explore further:

1. Enlarging the Lanzarote Community

First, we must increase the amount of ratifications of the Lanzarote Convention.

The Lanzarote Convention is frequently used by countries and organisations in the various continents as the reference normative framework when changing legislations and developing policies. This helps countries to fill gaps and combat sexual violence more efficiently. The more countries align their legislations with these standards, the easier the international cooperation becomes. This is very good news. But not good enough.

One of the Lanzarote Convention’s most important assets is what we call the “Lanzarote Community”. By becoming Parties to the Convention, States join this community and engage in a permanent dialogue with other governments, civil society, researchers, independent institutions, children... This dialogue is key to review progress achieved, discuss concerns, find solutions and agree on joint action. In a fast evolving world, keeping in touch is vital if we want to remain relevant and efficient. Now that the Convention has grown roots in the European continent, we should invest in expanding the Lanzarote Community by welcoming countries from other continents on board, starting by our neighbors in the South. Through the South Programme, the Council of Europe is working already hand in hand with the governments of Morocco and Tunisia to integrate the Lanzarote Convention standards in their legislation and policies. Both have expressed the wish to accede and have been invited to do so by the Committee of Ministers. Both have invested energy in working towards accession by adapting legislation

and introducing programmes and measures to enhance protection of children against sexual violence. We are looking forward to celebrate these forthcoming accessions and many others.

2. Reaching a universal goal

The second avenue we should explore to fully exploit the Lanzarote Convention potential is to use this treaty in support of the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

As you know, the 2030 Agenda is a global commitment and a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It is unique in many senses:

1. for the first time, it recognises that sustainable development cannot exist without human rights, democracy and rule of law (versus a “poverty/environment” agenda) ;
2. it sets goals and targets that are relevant for all countries in the world and strives to leave no one behind (versus “poor countries”-oriented agenda);
3. it stresses the importance of partnerships, participation and mobilization at all levels, including of children and young people (versus a “governments-only” agenda).

This all means that the 2030 Agenda is highly relevant for the CoE... and the CoE highly relevant for the 2030 Agenda!

The Lanzarote Convention can play (and is already playing) a key role in supporting States in their efforts to reach several targets of the 2030 Agenda, in particular TARGET 16.2: “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children”. Its standards can be used as benchmarks and indicators; the Lanzarote Committee may contribute by collecting data and reviewing progress; in its capacity of cooperation platform, the Lanzarote Committee is also very well suited to concretely address the challenges identified.

Dear participants:

The partnerships that we have developed and consolidated during the last ten years have been instrumental to the success of the work around the Lanzarote Convention. In the years to come, the idea of partnerships should be fully integrated in the way we design, plan, implement and assess the effectiveness of the measures that we take.

The list of our partners is long and I cannot mention them all. Let me nevertheless thank in particular the European Union, the United Nations, EUROPOL and INTERPOL, ENOC, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions, EUROCHILD, ECPAT, Missing Children Europe, Bedfordshire University, and many more.

Dear participants:

Eradicating sexual violence against children can feel at times at a daunting task. When I feel frustrated, tired or angry, I take comfort in thinking that we are not just moving papers. That we are a community making a difference. A world of difference.