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Moderating speaking notes

Conference on the 10th anniversary of Lanzarote Convention

“Ending sexual exploitation and abuse of children: towards a world of trust”

Session 3: Trust without borders: Protecting migrant and
refugee children from sexual exploitation and abuse

24 October 2017

- Thank you for inviting me to this conference on the 10th anniversary of the Lanzarote Convention and for having me as a moderator in this session, which will focus on protection of migrant and refugee children from sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Since my appointment in 2016 as Secretary General’s Special Representative on migration and refugees, I found striking the multiple ways in which the vulnerability of migrant and refugee children exposes them to violence, exploitation, and abuse. This is a pervasive phenomenon. During my fact-finding missions I have received information about repeated allegations and reports of sexual abuse in respect of refugee and migrant children, as well as about factors exposing them to such forms of violence. Missing children, smuggling, trafficking, detention and inappropriate detention conditions, ineffective safeguards, like age-assessment and guardianship, are among the most common and obvious circumstances which raise serious concerns regarding the children’s safety.
- My findings refer to the situation in Council of Europe member states. But it is common knowledge that refugee and migrant children are equally or even more exposed to same forms of violence in their countries of origin and all along the migration path.
- Migrant and refugee children are at a significantly higher risk of being subject to sexual exploitation than other children. Their vulnerability is multiplied by them being children, being migrants and often being unaccompanied and undocumented.
- This is equally reflected in the statistics. A recent joint UNICEF /IOM report found that more than 75 per cent of migrant and refugee children trying to reach Europe via the Central Mediterranean route face appalling levels of abuse, exploitation and trafficking. This figure is over three times higher than the general statistics on child sexual violence (20%). It is reasonable to assume that the difference is even bigger in respect of unaccompanied refugee and migrant children.
- For this reason, I greatly appreciate the special attention the Lanzarote Committee has given to collecting information and practices from member states on the protection of refugee and migrant children from sexual exploitation and abuse. The tenth anniversary of the Lanzarote Convention is a good opportunity indeed to take stock of challenges and of action for the future.
- Before speaking about the future, this session will discuss firstly the existing challenges. For this purpose, I am asking Ms Kristina MARKU, Child Protection Coordinator, Hope for Children CRC Policy Centre from Cyprus to be my interlocutor in a discussion witnessing our first-hand experience on the ground. The “Hope For Children” CRC Policy Centre is an international humanitarian and independent Institution based in Nicosia, Cyprus and working on humanitarian and development policy relevant to the defence and promotion of children’s rights. I am informed that this centre operates two private homes for unaccompanied children providing care and other support service. At the same time, the centre has been active in doing research in this area.