

January 2014

**Comments to the Lanzarote committee  
of the Council of Europe's Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and  
sexual abuse**

Barnaheill – Save the Children in Iceland (the organisation) is grateful for the opportunity it is given to make comments to the Lanzarote committee on the implementation of the Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in Iceland. Barnaheill – Save the Children, a non-governmental organisation, takes the liberty to send its general comments on the status of the category of sexual offences against children in Iceland, in connection with the two questionnaires the state Party is obliged to answer, according to a decision of the Lanzarote committee and article 1(2) of the convention.

Overall, the organisation is pleased with the implementation of the convention since its ratification by Iceland, and as well as with various measures the state has entered into out of pressing need, during the recent year for the purpose of increasing awareness in society on the frequency of sexual offences against children, preventing sexual abuse of children and promoting children's rights. Nevertheless there are a number of matters the organisation is concerned about. These will be discussed separately, in the following sections.

The law: The criminal code of Iceland was amended in June 2012, and the changes that were made were meant to standardize the criminal code with the Lanzarote convention, in connection with its ratification by Iceland. Barnaheill – Save the Children in Iceland sent its comments to the parliament before the bill was passed where it described its concerns on the phrasing of the criminalisation of the seduction of children via the internet. Its suggestions were not adhered to. The organisation finds it really important that the law is amended to include oral seduction via the internet. At present article 202, par. 4 of the Icelandic criminal code, only declares it punishable to seduce a child via the internet by making an agreement to meet the child for the purpose of abusing the child in some way. The organisation finds it important that the seduction of children on the internet is criminalised, even though there is no intention of meeting the child. To clarify: seducing a child to act in a sexual manner or using phrases or words that may seem sexually inappropriate, via the internet, is an offence against the child in itself and should be clearly punishable.

Education of people/groups, working closely with children: Barnaheill – Save the Children in Iceland is concerned with the lack of education and courses in Icelandic educational institutions, with a focus on sexual abuse of children, prevention and reaction. The organisation made a study on the availability of educational material in Icelandic universities as well as in the police academy, on supply of courses that cover education or training on how to recognise signs of sexual abuse in children's behaviour, on how to react if a child describes their experience of being sexually abused,

on how to support the child etc. The study showed that there were a very few courses where it was clear from the course description, that it covered some form of education on the matter. Barnaheill – Save the Children in Iceland emphasizes its deep concern by the lack of courses in Icelandic educational institutions, that are meant to train employees that work closely with children, on responding to a child's expression about its experiences of sexual abuse and on how to react in such circumstances.

**Lack of funding:** In the year 2013 the Icelandic government and parliament decided to increase the budget to the category of sexual offences against children. Of course this measure was made out of necessity but nonetheless is well appreciated. Still there is a pressing need for higher budgets for the child protection system in general. The workload of the child protection committees in Iceland is too heavy and cases per employee are too many. There is a pressing need to hire more people to work within the child protection system in Iceland. There's a reason to believe that its services are not fulfilling the need and the number of cases on hand.

**Support to child victims of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation:** Barnaheill – Save the Children in Iceland points out that there is a need to secure sufficient support for child victims of sexual abuse. The need for both medical and psychological support is just as important, therefore the authorities have to secure enough funding so that every victim can have access to a psychologist as needed to be able to process the horrific experience and to be able to lead a healthy, good life.

Barnaheill – Save the Children in Iceland recommends that more effort will be put into measures of prevention and precaution regarding sexual abuse, especially of children. We need to prevent the crimes from happening. The society needs to be informed about how people and children can avoid certain circumstances where the likelihood of sexual abuse may be higher than in other circumstances. Children need to be educated about how to respond to an invitation from someone they don't know, whether they meet them on the street or via the internet. Children need to be taught that they're allowed to say no to someone that wants them to do something which is against their will, in this connection it is important to bear in mind that most cases of sexual abuse include an offender which the child knows. Schools and the educational system have to be strengthened, both economically and with better and more instructions, to be able to attend to this category as needed, instructions to children about how to prevent sexual abuse, how to seek help if they experience sexual abuse and the need for them to tell someone. Society as a whole has to protect children against sexual abuse and everyone has to keep their eyes open.

Sincerely,

Erna Reynisdóttir

Managing director of Barnaheill – Save the Children in Iceland