

PREVENTING SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN **Elda Moreno**

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

For the Council of Europe, children are not “mini human beings with mini human rights”. There is no “for adults only” warning in any of our regional or universal human rights treaties. Moreover, children’s rights have been clearly spelled out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which is neither less binding nor less enforceable than any other treaty.

And yet. In Europe, today, millions of children are victims of violence. And this violence remains invisible, under-reported and under-recorded. For Albert Einstein, the world was a dangerous place to live. Not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it.

In 2006, the 192 members States of the UN discovered the magnitude of the phenomenon of violence against children. In my opinion, this is one of the most critical problems human kind has to solve. As a matter of urgency.

The 2006 UN Secretary-General’s Global Report on Violence against Children gave the first comprehensive, global analysis of the nature, extent and causes of violence against children. The Study presented to the United Nations General Assembly also put forward a set of recommendations for individual countries and the international community at large.

Certainly not by coincidence, the first of these recommendations was a call to all States to:

- *"develop a multifaceted and systematic framework to respond to violence against children which is integrated into national planning processes.*

- *A national strategy, policy or plan of action on violence against children with realistic and time-bound targets, coordinated by an agency with the capacity to involve multiple sectors in a broad-based implementation strategy, should be formulated.”*

Since the publication of the Study on violence against children in 2006, the Council of Europe has made a point of promoting a proper follow up to its recommendations. Our obvious first move was therefore the adoption of policy guidelines to support States in the development of an integrated national strategy to combat violence against children. We suggested a model based on a number of key components.

These include:

FIRST: the legislative framework prioritising prevention of violence and prohibiting all forms of violence against children;

SECOND: the institutional framework, encompassing amongst others, the body with the primary responsibility of protecting children from violence, as well as an independent human rights institution observing compliance with the rights of the child in the country;

THIRD: the culture of zero tolerance to violence against children within society and specifically amongst professionals working in contact with children;

FOURTH: the promotion of child-friendly services and mechanisms to enable children to report acts of violence, and providing targeted and prompt assistance and support to child victims, witnesses, perpetrators of violence, and their families;

and FIFTH: the measures to strengthen international co-operation to prevent and combat violence against children, protect and assist child victims and witnesses and investigate or prosecute criminal offences involving violence against children.

The Guidelines also recall the importance of building a culture of respect for children’s rights. Evidence has already showed the

advantage of a child rights based approach over a welfare approach.

Actions that are based on a traditional welfare approach are weaker and more vulnerable to economic crisis or to changes in political priorities, rely heavily on a limited number of professionals; they tend to concentrate on victims and on a few situations of vulnerability (for instance, children living in poverty).

Actions that are based on children's rights increase the quality of results, have an important preventive effect, touch larger segments of the population, involve many stakeholders and are more empowering, cost-effective and sustainable.

For a rights based approach to develop, it is also important to "operationalize" concepts such as "child friendly services". This is why the Council of Europe has also invested in providing guidance to countries on how child friendly justice, social services or health care should look like.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A strategy is a framework for action. Some forms of violence call for specific measures and, at the Council of Europe, we have decided to start by addressing the most widespread forms of violence, like corporal punishment, sexual violence and gender-based violence.

The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the "Lanzarote Convention") belongs to a generation of treaties that already incorporates this transversal and integrated vision of the fight against violence. This is the same approach that we find in a more recent Council of Europe Convention, the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

With all this work comes the rewarding news that Europe has achieved important progress.

The problem of violence has reached the political agenda and many countries have taken crucial steps to improve their

normative frameworks, in particular to fight gender-based violence, sexual abuse and exploitation.

Unfortunately, changes do not come along easily and quickly enough. Seven years after the publication of the UN global report, very few States have developed comprehensive, well resourced and well coordinated strategies to prevent and combat violence against children. The scale and persistence of children's rights violations should give us a sense of urgency. Instead, we are still playing with words and hiding behind the lack of data; we are compromising and getting our priorities wrong.

These days, the world is mourning because of the loss of Nelson Mandela, a champion of peace, justice and reconciliation. When looking to the immense task ahead of us, I can't resist the temptation of quoting "Tata Mandela":

"It always seems impossible until it's done."

Thank you very much for your attention