

10th anniversary of the Council of Europe Convention for the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

Conference
**Ending sexual exploitation and abuse of children:
Towards a world of trust**
24 – 25 October 2017

Opening session

Draft speaking notes for Ambassador Emil RUFFER,
Chairman of the Committee of Ministers' Deputies of the Council of Europe, Czech Republic

Ladies and gentlemen,

Protecting children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse is a crucial responsibility for us all. Children must feel safe and secure in the environment in which they live and be protected from all harm and violence. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. We know too well the alarming number of children who are victims of sexual violence. And this has to change.

Ten years on from the opening for signature of the Lanzarote Convention, I am pleased to open this Conference on behalf of the Committee of Ministers in order to highlight the success of this instrument in the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children.

To date, the Convention has been signed by all member States of the Council of Europe and ratified by 42 member States¹, with my own country the Czech Republic doing so in May last year. This illustrates the vital importance that all member States attach to the issue. It is hoped that the remaining member States will ratify in the near future. Furthermore, Tunisia and Morocco are in the process of acceding to the Convention which is a welcome development demonstrating that it can be an important tool beyond Europe's borders in combating sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

The Convention, which covers all types of sexual offences against minors, has focused the attention of governments on the need to act, to enact specific legislation and to take measures to prevent sexual violence but also to protect child victims and prosecute perpetrators. Through the thematic monitoring process of the Convention, concrete changes and results – which is the aim of any such legal instrument - are achieved in member States. It not only helps to ensure

¹ Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ireland, Norway and the UK have not yet ratified.

the effective implementation of the Convention, highlighting challenges faced by Parties but also provides a platform for capacity building and for exchange of good practices. One such example is the Icelandic children houses which have now spread all over the continent and which will be explained by Mr Guðbrandsson this afternoon. But there are of course many others.

The Committee of Ministers welcomes the annual exchanges with the Lanzarote Committee Chairperson as an enriching opportunity to learn about achievements and challenges in this area. During the most recent exchange, it was informed of two recent developments in the practice of the Committee; first, that NGOs have a more active role in the monitoring process of the Committee since they now can comment on Parties replies to questionnaires; second, that the Lanzarote Committee organised its first country visit (in Hungary last July). I personally find these developments positive as they allow for the Committee to obtain more information on national situations.

I would take the opportunity to recall that, in order to raise public awareness of these issues and of the need to prevent such acts, the Committee of Ministers established the European Day for the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse which, since 2015, is marked on 18 November. I would urge all stakeholders to take ownership of this day so that it achieves its aim. To this end, you are certainly aware that there is much valuable material available from the Council of Europe - I would therefore encourage all here to use it for their awareness-raising activities.

Before finishing, I should just like to underline the Czech Republic's particular commitment towards the protection of children's rights is one of the priorities of our chairmanship. We have strongly supported the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021) adopted by the Committee of Ministers last year – and which includes a chapter on protecting children from all forms of violence. We shall make every effort to ensure its effective implementation. We have also committed ourselves to take steps during our Chairmanship to encourage the broadest possible ratification and implementation of the Lanzarote Convention.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Conference programme is ambitious. You will be addressing hugely important and broad issues. Some of the testimonies and experiences that will be voiced may be difficult to speak about and also to be heard. So I would like to thank the many participants that have agreed to contribute in this way to the Conference and also those who are bringing their expertise to the various themes to be discussed. I am certain that the discussions will be fruitful and that everybody present will go home rich with new ideas and experiences, that they can then use directly, or as inspiration, in their own policies and practice in order to better protect our children.

Thank you for your attention.