

Stockholm Congress: KEYNOTE STATEMENT

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It is a great honour for ECPAT to be associated with the welcome to you this morning. When we first talked of the need for such a Congress in June 1994 it seemed like an impossible dream. Today, thanks to the enthusiastic support of the Swedish Government and people, the dream becomes a reality.

At first sight our task in the Congress seems clear and unambiguous. We must find the strategies which will ensure that child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes will be ended. It is simple to state but there are new pressures on us which will make the goal increasingly difficult.

One of the most significant features of the 21st century will certainly be a massive move toward globalization. The signs are everywhere evident: The commercial world speaks with enthusiasm of world trade and an open market. The tourism industry is predicting a dramatic increase in the number of people traveling to all parts of the planet. Above all, the explosion in the communications industry and the emerging impact of the Internet and satellite transmission has begun to challenge us in a new way with both the advantages and the dangers of a world without borders.

A united world is a very utopian proposition and it is one of many attractive aspects to globalization. It is an inspiring vision to speak of a new unity among humankind in the 21st century with its hope for a better world of peace and justice.

But nothing is simple and there is a down-side to globalization. It is one of the negative consequences of developing globalism which has brought us together in this Congress.

Children have become casualties on the march to a global society. Under the pressure of commercialism, children have changed from being subjects and are being made into objects.

When global values are determined by television and commercial market forces, children and young women end up becoming commodities to be bought and sold at whim. This must change. Children cannot be purchased like items at a supermarket. Children are not goods to be smuggled across borders to meet the demands for child sex from foreigners. Children have rights which must be respected and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which almost all governments have signed, makes this clear. The world community must ensure that children everywhere enjoy their fundamental rights, free and secure from all forms of commercial sexual exploitation.

About three years ago the ECPAT campaign made an important breakthrough in its thinking.

Our campaign began in 1991 and for the first three years we worked hard in more than 20 countries to uncover the hidden world of commercial child sex. We heard terrible stories, saw trafficking, pornography and exploitation which have now become common knowledge. Our main focus was on the nation and we lobbied to get legal changes which would give more protection to children in their own countries.

As we began to work more closely with international law enforcement groups -- particularly Interpol -- and with international tourism agencies such as UFTAA and WTO, it became increasingly evident to us that the issue of commercial child sexual abuse could not be solved by any single nation working alone. What we were dealing with was clearly a global trade in children promoted by international cartels of criminals and sex abusers which crossed all national boundaries. We came to realize that their crimes against humanity could only be countered by international action.

As a consequence, ECPAT convened a consultation for governments and NGOs in Bangkok in June 1994 and from that meeting came the recommendation that an international Congress was

urgently needed so that governments could plan together measures which would end this widespread abuse of children. We will continue to pay tribute to the Swedish Government that they shared this understanding and had the courage to host this first World Congress.

By our estimates there will be tonight upwards of a million children in Asia alone who will spend the evening providing sexual services for adults. If our surveys are correct they will receive 10-12 million adult male customers during the week we are in Stockholm.

Children deserve better than this.

It is hard to know which is the greater evil: the fact that so many children are used in commercial sex or the fact that so many male adults are willing to abuse them. I have grown old in these last six years with ECPAT. The constant reminder that there are adult men from your country and mine who travel around the world to have sex with a young boy or girl sometimes as young as 9 or 10 years is still beyond my comprehension. It would be easy to despair or grow cynical.

But despair cannot be in our vocabulary. We represent another voice here today and it is a voice of hope for the future of our children. It is in their name that we are here and it is for them and for the future of our nations that we must work to find a solution to this evil.

Today we begin to discuss the Congress Declaration and the Agenda for Action. This will be our opportunity to put in place honest measures within each of our countries, and internationally, which will be effective in ending the commercial trade in children.

When the Planning Committee worked on the programme for this Congress, the over-riding concern was that we should not have just another talking group passing nicely-worded resolutions. The Agenda for Action was seen by us as the most important outcome of our meeting together because it will offer some genuine hope to the million children kept in slavery.

We urge you to approve the Agenda with enthusiasm -- but more than that, to go back to your governments and organizations determined to implement the fine resolutions you have passed. The people you are representing want that to happen.

When ECPAT began its campaign to end child prostitution just over five years ago we were surprised at the spontaneous support which came from every corner of the world. We had clearly struck a responsive chord and there was strong community response.

Over the last two years we have discussed whether the Congress was enough. Whether ECPAT should now close down and leave the struggle to the governments and the many other agencies represented here. When we raised that possibility, there was a cry of outrage from our constituency. "The task is not finished," they said. "The governments will need the support of a community movement," said others.

As a result, ECPAT has now decided that it will continue at least for another five years after the Congress and we will hope that by that time the Agenda we confirm here will be so well implemented that there will be no further need for an organization like ours.

This Congress is a meeting place for many different groups and disciplines but we have a common agenda. With our common commitment and with strong action from governments we will together end the sexual slavery of children and make the world a safer place for coming generations.

It is a terrible evil that commercial sexual abuse of children occurs at all. It would be an even greater evil if we failed to take action to stop it.