

Stockholm Congress: OPENING STATEMENT

Göran Persson, Prime Minister of Sweden

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

I am most honored to welcome you all to Stockholm and to Sweden.

There is an increasing awareness around the world of the most brutal, the most savage and disgusting category of crime: commercial sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

The plague of child prostitution and pornography, and the sale of and trafficking in children, has increased dramatically in the last few years. Millions of children around the world are being sexually abused.

The moral dismay, the grief and the desperation are not only burning in the souls of the children and families that are directly afflicted, but within all of us. We all feel compassion for the victims. Many of us have also felt a cold sense of recognition. It could just as easily have been our own children: used and abused by those they were taught to trust -- the adults.

There are few, if any, social perversions that both in our intellect and our feelings we find so completely evil as these acts.

Let it be said again and again at this conference: The world, each and every country, can never accept that innocent children are being used and injured for the rest of their lives by the commercial interests of immoral and ruthless people.

All children -- everywhere on this planet -- have a right to be treated as human beings with individual human rights.

We must continue to support the global vision -- the evolution of a society for all.

Our abhorrence, and the depth of our compassion, will be put to the test by our willingness to take action.

The people of the world -- not least those living in Europe -- are today horrified and shocked by the most recent example of inhumanity. The ghastly crimes that lately have been revealed in the middle of Europe have left no-one untouched.

Therefore I say: This is the time for initiatives, this is the time for firm and distinct action. This congress is, without doubt, an important part of that process.

The international conventions, agreements and declarations that already exist are, at the international level, a good basis for giving our children full rights and protection. Thus, rather than to adopt new international instruments, we must concentrate our efforts on how these existing instruments can be used and, at the national level, be implemented in an efficient way.

At this congress we must shed light on the abuse and commercial exploitation that are taking place in almost every country of the world. And then we must go from words to deeds by developing strategies to fight these intolerable acts.

The aims for this congress are ambitious. It is my hope that they will be achieved and prove to be powerful in future combat against commercial sexual exploitation.

If we can reach a common definition of the scope of the problem, if we can highlight relevant issues and provide an open forum for discussion, if we can identify ways to raise public awareness, if we can adopt a Declaration and an Agenda for Action, and if we can start the concrete work, then this congress will clearly be a great leap forward in struggle for a better world for the children.

International co-operation is no longer a matter only for states, but increasingly also a most

important matter for NGOs. An excellent example of this was the initiative taken by the organization End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism, which proposed the gathering of this congress. The Swedish government was most honored by the fact that we were asked to host it. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude, both for that trust and for the constructive co-operation from ECPAT, UNICEF and the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

I believe that this congress has already taken the first steps on the path towards achieving its aims. The increasing awareness of the problem is to some extent due to this congress, to all the nations and to all the NGOs that are represented here.

The issue we are addressing is an international and moral problem. It is my belief that only through co-operation between states and NGOs all over the world can we be successful in achieving the total abolition of commercial sexual exploitation of children.

To abuse our children is to abuse our future.