

*This briefing note is a contribution of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ECPAT International to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.*

## From Stockholm to Yokohama

In August 1996, 122 governments met in Stockholm, Sweden, to discuss and commit themselves to act against the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The first World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children was a ground-breaking event. Hosted by the Government of Sweden in cooperation with UNICEF, the campaigning organization ECPAT, and the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, this was the first time governmental, United Nations and civil society players had joined forces as equal partners to address this serious violation of children's rights to health, safety, protection and freedom from harm.

Five years later, in 2001, the Government of Japan and its co-conveners -- UNICEF, ECPAT International and the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child -- invite governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), inter-governmental players and private sector representatives, young people and others working to eliminate commercial sexual exploitation of children, to meet and see what progress has been made. In this working Congress, the focus will be on bringing information up to date, building on experiences since Stockholm, sharing lessons learned and moving forward with improved understanding, more and better ideas for action, new partnerships and even stronger commitment.

In addition to drawing international attention to the commercial sexual exploitation of children, the Second World Congress, to be held from 17 to 20 December 2001 in the Conference Centre in Pacifico Yokohama, has four expected outcomes:

- A review of progress in implementing the Stockholm Agenda for Action;
- Enhanced political commitment to implementing the Agenda for Action and strengthened follow-up;
- Identification of major problem areas or gaps in the protection of children from sexual exploitation;
- The sharing of expertise and good practice in this field.

The Congress will comprise plenary sessions at which governments, intergovernmental, non-governmental and other civil society actors will report on their experiences in attempting to implement the Agenda for Action since 1996, share information on changes and new challenges since 1996, and explore means to continue and enhance efforts to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children.

### **The Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action**

Beyond committing themselves to 'a global partnership' against the challenge of commercial sexual exploitation of children, the participants at Stockholm called upon 'all States in cooperation with national and international organizations and civil society' to:

- give high priority and adequate resources to action against commercial sexual exploitation of children;
- promote stronger cooperation among all sectors and strengthen the role of families in protecting children;
- criminalize all forms of sexual exploitation of children, penalize offenders and ensure that their child victims are not penalized;

- review, revise, enforce and promote laws, policies, programmes and practices to eliminate CSEC;
- develop and implement gender-sensitive plans and programmes in prevention, protection, recovery and reintegration;
- create a climate that enables carers to fulfil their obligations towards children;
- mobilize political and other partners;
- enhance the role of popular participation, including that of children, in preventing and eliminating commercial sexual exploitation.

This Declaration of commitment and intent was accompanied by a detailed Agenda for Action with specific targets in the areas of coordination and cooperation, prevention, protection, recovery and reintegration and child participation. These targets are wide-ranging and comprehensive, and offer detailed suggestions for activity by a wide range of different actors and sectors, from governments to media professionals, and from NGOs to the private sector.

In particular, by the year 2000, the Agenda for Action calls for:

- National action plans with indicators of progress, set goals and a time-frame for implementation, aimed at reducing the number of children vulnerable to sexual exploitation;
- Implementation and monitoring mechanisms, or focal points, at national and local levels so that disaggregated data can be collected and shared on children vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and on their exploiters.<sup>1</sup>

### **Involving a wide range of contributors**

Reports on implementation of the Agenda for Action and consideration of emerging issues since 1996 will be punctuated with a number of panel presentations and discussions designed to introduce cutting-edge thinking to participants as they consider both what has been learned and what more can be done to eliminate commercial sexual exploitation of children.

A large variety of workshops will aim to encourage more detailed and direct sharing of experiences, methodologies, lessons learned and outstanding challenges. The presence of the international media is sought and encouraged, not only because of the crucial role of the media in relation to this issue but also because public awareness and understanding of commercial sexual exploitation of children is crucial to child protection and to zero tolerance of the phenomenon.

Although children and young people will participate in the Congress itself, they will additionally be hosted by Kawasaki City in the days preceding the Yokohama meeting and will be given the opportunity there to discuss commercial sexual exploitation on their own terms. From 13 to 16 December, children and young people from countries around the world will report on the situation in their own regions and prepare their input to the Yokohama Congress.

In the run-up to December, there will be a series of regional consultations to allow a wider number of people to participate in the preparatory process. These meetings – organized by UNICEF for governments and their partners and by the NGO community for civil society players along with governments – will focus on regional concerns and specificities. They will also allow grassroots organizations who might not be able to travel to Japan to be represented in the process of sharing experiences and drawing lessons and will mean that more young people can participate in the process.

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of the Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action is available on the Congress website: [www.focalpointngo.org/yokohama](http://www.focalpointngo.org/yokohama).

## **Commercial sexual exploitation of children: progress since 1996**

Much has been done since 1996: action has been taken to remove children from exploitation and aid their recovery and reintegration into society; campaigns have increased public awareness and targeted specific groups whose understanding is vital; projects have sought to protect children particularly vulnerable to exploitation; research has improved understanding of exploiters, mechanisms and obstacles to overcome.

An Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography has been adopted and opened for signature. ILO Convention 182 was adopted in June 1999; it provides that ILO members shall take immediate and effective measures to prohibit and eliminate the worst forms of child labour, including child prostitution and child pornography. A Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, has also been adopted and opened for signature. National laws have been reviewed and strengthened, and more than 21 countries can now apply extraterritorial legislation, which allows the prosecution of nationals who have committed offences against children in other countries. Thirty-four countries have developed National Plans of Action against commercial sexual exploitation of children and 26 more are developing such plans. Still we have hardly begun to scratch the surface of the problem.

Every year, millions of children are still sacrificed to gratify the sexual pleasure and profit-making motives of exploiters worldwide. It is impossible to say how many children are the victims of this criminal activity, for they are more often than not hidden -- locked out of sight in seedy brothels, sold from trucks plying trade along borders, sometimes exploited far away from home in towns and countries to which they have been trafficked, or perhaps in middle-class suburban schools and shopping centres.

For no country is free of commercial sexual exploitation, no society immune and no child fully protected. Poverty, traditional practices, racism and discrimination, family dysfunction, drugs and conflict increase the vulnerability of children to exploitation of all forms, as does the very fact of being female. But the pressures of consumerism, misconceptions about sexuality and health, and above all increased demand and the profit motive mean that many children not normally considered vulnerable are also at risk. The isolating yet global world of new media sees children targeted by on-line stalkers and exploiters, while the child pornography trade reaches out ever faster and wider to those who exploit at a distance.

Demand is driven by both paedophiles and non-paedophile abusers. Supply is assured when poor families knowingly or unwittingly sell their children into sex, when 'granny' recruiters promise villagers an income through their children, by pimps and madams who see children as a commodity to be traded, by syndicates who traffic children like contraband goods. And much of this is abetted by widespread complicity: taxi drivers who facilitate rendez-vous, hotel clerks who turn a blind eye, neighbours who forgive the man next door his little foibles.

Wherever it happens, in whatever form and facilitated by whichever individual or group, one thing is certain: the commercial sexual exploitation of children is pervasive and never very far away.