

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **UNICEF URGES COUNTRIES IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA TO EQUIP THEMSELVES TO COMBAT TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN INTO THE SEX TRADE**

**GENEVA, 13 November 2001** - The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, is calling on governments in Europe and Central Asia to ratify three international instruments that are vital to efforts to combat trafficking in children, a growing problem in the region: the 2000 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography; the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000); and ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999).

UNICEF Regional Director for Europe, Stephen Woodhouse, said today, "We must not underestimate the use of international conventions in our work to end the heinous trade in children for sexual purposes and exploitative labour. These are not just vague promises; they provide frameworks that, among other things, smooth out differences between national laws."

The call for ratification comes one week before the opening of the European and Central Asian preparatory conference to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Yokohama, Japan, 17-20 December). This meeting, to be held in Budapest on 20 and 21 November, will bring together 52 countries of Europe and Central Asia to discuss progress since the first World Congress in Stockholm in 1996, to share experiences and lessons learned, and to develop a regional strategy for accelerated implementation of the Stockholm Agenda for Action.

It also comes at a time of growing concern about the number of women and children being moved across the borders of Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Baltic States (all loosely grouped as 'Europe and Central Asia' for the preparatory meeting). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that 175,000 people are trafficked from Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS each year – roughly one quarter of the estimated 700,000 to 2 million people trafficked around the world annually.

Many of the countries in the region are in the throes of transition. Their proximity to societies perceived, particularly by young people to offer more stable and prosperous lifestyles is an important factor in this movement. Increasingly open borders between Member States of the European Union facilitate movement into and through Western Europe.

In the region, too, there exist a number of factors that increase the vulnerability of children to exploitation: in Western Europe, a growth in the commercial sex sector and growing consumerism put pressure on children to earn money in a situation of unmet demand for commercial sex. Poverty and discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, disability and citizenship status are all important vulnerability factors. In many of the transition countries, high levels of unemployment, inadequate skills and training for available employment opportunities, and poor preparation of children and young people for work and social integration, all increase pressures on children to seek alternative ways to earn money for their family or their future. This may make them more vulnerable to pimps and recruiters seeking to exploit them in commercial sex work or encourage them – or indeed force them – to move within the country or across borders where perceived returns are greater.

In the transition countries, too, the more than one million children who are growing up in institutions, rather than with their families, are at particular risk as they exit unprepared into societies that are equally unprepared to integrate them.

The Budapest meeting will hear that these disturbing challenges will nevertheless be met by some positive developments since the first World Congress in 1996:

- Increased public awareness of CSEC, and decreased tolerance of those who exploit or abuse.
- An increased knowledge base and, importantly, better and more detailed understanding of both the demand and supply sides of CSEC;
- Improved effectiveness and professionalism built on this knowledge base and supported by better information sharing, good practice formulation, strategic planning and consultation;
- Better cooperation across borders, within countries and regions, and among the different sectors involved in combating this multi-faceted phenomenon: child protection agencies, governments, intergovernmental bodies, law enforcement, social services;
- New laws in many countries, including the introduction of extraterritorial jurisdiction provisions, and some national plans of action against CSEC;

### **PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

Multilateral conference organized by the Council of Europe in cooperation with UNICEF and the National Institute of Criminology of Hungary

Venue: Conference Centre, Central European University,  
Kerepesi út 87, H-Budapest 1106

Time: Tuesday 20 November, 08.30 – 17.00;  
Wednesday 21 November, 09.00 – 17.00

**For further information on the Yokohama Congress, preparatory consultations, and story/interview opportunities on issues relating to CSEC, contact the Congress Media Advisor on:**

E-mail: [yokomedia@pleasehelp.co.uk](mailto:yokomedia@pleasehelp.co.uk)

Tel: +41 22 328 27 85 (outside office hours: +41 79 695 64 88)

fax: +41 22 329 03 10

**For direct contact with UNICEF, please contact:**

Hans Olsen, Geneva Regional Office, tel: +41 22 909 5517, email: [holsen@unicef.org](mailto:holsen@unicef.org)

Wivina Belmonte, Geneva Regional Office, tel +41 22 909 5509, email: [wbelmonte@unicef.org](mailto:wbelmonte@unicef.org)

Robert Cohen, CEE,CIS&Baltics Regional Office, tel +41 22 909 5631, email: [rcohen@unicef.org](mailto:rcohen@unicef.org)

Venus Easwaran, CEE,CIS&Baltics Reg. Office, tel +41 22 909 5629, email: [veaswaran@unicef.org](mailto:veaswaran@unicef.org)

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