

## **Nations across Europe and Central Asia strengthen their fight against sexual exploitation of children**

*Geneva, 19 November 2001:* In their steadfast conviction that there should be zero-tolerance when it comes to the issue of sexual exploitation of children, the Council of Europe, UNICEF and the Government of Hungary tomorrow open a two-day conference in Budapest (20-21 November), to discuss lessons learned in Europe and Central Asia and come up with new ways of combating it.

This regional conference comes at an important time -- five years after the first ever World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) held in Stockholm in 1996, and only a month before the 2nd World Congress in Yokohama, Japan (17-20 December).

“The issue is complex, but our message is simple: sexual exploitation of children is a crime that threatens the lives of children. It must stop,” said Stephen Woodhouse, UNICEF Regional Director for Europe. “Combating sexual exploitation of children is everyone’s responsibility.”

The need to address CSEC regionally as well as nationally is well illustrated by the nature of the challenges to be discussed in Budapest, which include cross-border trafficking, sex tourism, abuse across the Internet, and the growing involvement of organized crime. These all call for international collaboration, like concerted law enforcement, and extraterritorial and harmonized legislation.

Keynote presentations will include discussions about the trends, issues, priorities and lessons learned in fighting what has become a growing menace to the rights of children in the region and around the world. Working group sessions will focus on: legislation and law enforcement; prevention, protection, recovery and reintegration of children; trafficking in children for the purpose of sexual exploitation; child prostitution and pornography (including through computer systems); and the role of intergovernmental institutions and agencies.

The problem in Europe and Central Asia has shifted and developed over the past five years. Despite increased action and improved legislation to counter child sexual exploitation the problem has worsened. While sex tourism and child pornography is still a problem, focus has moved to trafficking for sexual exploitation. No country is immune. Trafficking routes affect the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltics and Western Europe.

Economic differentials, pockets of unmet demand and real and perceived lifestyle opportunities provide a favourable environment for in-country and cross-border exploitation of children, both on the supply and the demand sides.

The meeting in Budapest will aim to conclude with agreement on a Plan of Action to translate the 1996 Stockholm Agenda for Action into a regional blueprint for the future to protect children across Europe and Central Asia from sexual exploitation and ensure their rights to full protection and development. Along with the outcomes of five more regional consultations taking place in November and December, the Europe and Central Asia Plan of Action will be used in the Yokohama meeting as the basis for exchange of ideas and experiences, and for building future global partnerships.