

**2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children  
Yokohama, Japan, 17-20 December 2001**

**CLOSING PRESS RELEASE from UNICEF, ECPAT INTERNATIONAL AND  
THE NGO GROUP FOR THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

**MEETING ON CHILD SEX EXCEEDS BEST EXPECTATIONS**

**Yokohama, Japan, 20 December 2001:** “The Congress has achieved all we expected – and more,” co-organizers of a global conference against sexual exploitation of children said today. Billed as a “working meeting” at which governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, young people and others engaged in combating the global trade in child sex would share experiences, learn from each other and plan future actions, the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress also concluded with a “Yokohama Global Commitment” reaffirming but also reinforcing promises made at the first World Congress in 1996.

Reflecting the outcomes of six regional preparatory meetings designed to reflect regional situations, priorities and strengths, the more than 3,000 participants put “the protection and promotion of the interests and rights of the child to be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation” as their primary consideration, paving the way for reinforced government and grassroots action against such sexual violations as genital mutilation, early marriage, sexual abuse as a weapon of war and abuse in the home.

Co-sponsors UNICEF, ECPAT International and the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child praised conference co-organizer, the Government of Japan, for their work to ensure that the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress was a worthy and practical follow-up to the 1996 meeting in Stockholm.

And they expressed great satisfaction that these efforts had, in fact, resulted in a conference that was even bigger in scope than anticipated: planned for 2,000 participants, the Congress attracted 3,045 people; the participation of 134 government delegations exceeded the 122 who attended in 1996. Crucially, while youth participation in 1996 took the form of an intervention from a separate meeting of young people held at the same time, at the Yokohama Congress 90 official youth delegates participated in all aspects of the meeting and, additionally, organized their own roundtables, debates and presentations.

While expressing satisfaction that the Congress had been a significant success, however, the co-organizers underlined the challenges that remain in putting an end to the commercial sexual exploitation of children. “While real progress has been made since the first World Congress, there are indications that sexual exploitation of children is on the increase and new forms are emerging,” NGO Group spokesperson Raffaele Salinari told journalists at the closing press conference. “One lesson we have learned is that, if we are to fully protect children from exploitation, we have to acknowledge the links between entry into the commercial sex trade and other forms of sexual violence that damage their lives and increase their vulnerability to abuse”.

The Yokohama Global Commitment also calls for early ratification of international instruments that relate to sexual exploitation of children, for a reinforcement of efforts to address the root causes that put children at risk of exploitation, including poverty, inequality,

discrimination, persecution, violence, armed conflict, HIV/AIDS, dysfunctioning families and criminality. In the light of increased calls for child protection to be accompanied by action to reduce the demand side of the sex equation, the commitment also calls for action against those who sexually abuse and exploit children, while not criminalizing or penalizing their child victims.

“For us, the single most important message to come from this congress is that the demand side of commercial sexual exploitation has to be tackled in a serious way,” Muireann O Briain, Executive Director of ECPAT International said. “ECPAT International and its groups will be identifying strategies to address the question of why men want sex with young girls or boys.”

“For its part,” Mehr Khan, UNICEF Regional Director for East Asia and the Pacific, said, “UNICEF is giving increasing priority to child protection, including the issue of violence against children and their sexual exploitation. We will address it through many inter-linked avenues, the most important of which is prevention through education, especially girls’ education.”

All the partners underlined the urgency of the task. “Much greater political will and resources are needed,” Ms Khan said. “Partnerships and networks must be enlarged and children fully involved in the effort. At this congress, their energy and dedication have given us hope that they will build societies that will not tolerate the sexual exploitation and abuse of their children.”

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