

## **Regional meeting of Europe and Central Asia calls for criminalisation of sexual abuse of children**

Budapest, 21.11.2001 - The Conference on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation closed today with calls for criminalisation of all forms of sexual exploitation of children and urgent action to combat this growing problem in the region.

The Conference was organised by the COUNCIL OF EUROPE in cooperation with UNICEF and the Hungarian National Institute of Criminology to prepare regional input to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Yokohama, Japan, next month. It brought together European and Central Asian actors in the fight for zero tolerance against sexual exploitation of children, to review progress made in the region following the first World Congress, in Stockholm in 1996, and to develop a regional Plan of Action.

Participants committed themselves to according high priority and resources at national and regional level to implementing the Plan of Action and relevant international instruments in the field of child protection against all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation and, in fulfilment of promises made in Stockholm, to develop national action plans and assign national contact points in each country.

They urged the Council of Europe to follow up the regional Plan of Action, and practical application of its Recommendation (2001) 16 on the protection of children against sexual exploitation\*. The 43-nation Organisation should grant assistance to states, in particular with regard to information on experiences and model legislation, and identify problems such as resource needs. "The Recommendation provides for effective and practical means to fight sexual exploitation of children, and provides Member States with appropriate support and assistance. We will do everything possible to ensure that it leads to concrete action," Guy de Vel, Council of Europe Director General of Legal Affairs, said in his speech to the Conference.

Participants underscored the importance of considering sexual exploitation within the context of the broader sex trade, the sexualisation of childhood through advertising and mass media, and the need not only to continue efforts to protect children from sexual exploitation but to address the forces that drive demand for child sex.

Although some countries have committed to the prosecution of exploiters, and the broadening of criminal offences, more has to be done especially in the review of laws, policies and programmes in this field and strengthening networks of cooperation between law enforcement agencies.

Participants recognised that child prostitution and trafficking of children has become a huge concern for Europe and Central Asia, increasingly related to organized crime and abuse of new information technologies, and called for increased cooperation among states and the harmonization of legislation to tackle cross-border issues. They welcomed the new Council

of Europe Convention on Cybercrime, which will be opened for signature on 23 November in Budapest, and part of which is devoted to combating child pornography on the Internet.

Recognizing the ongoing need for better research and information on trends, mechanisms, shifts in demand and exploitation, they called for comprehensive mapping of the issue at both national and regional levels.

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(\* ) Recommendation (2001) 16 adopted by the Council of Europe last October contains a series of provisions to give member States specific indication on how to better protect children against sexual exploitation.

UNICEF Regional Director for Europe Stephen Woodhouse expressed his hope that the meeting will stimulate more countries in the region to move immediately to develop national plans of action. He emphasized the importance of the regional contribution to the international meeting in Japan in December. "I have no doubt that the contribution of this region to the work in Yokohama will be significant," he said, "but the Yokohama Congress will not be the end of the work, just another step forward. The commitments made in Budapest will underpin future work in this region to put an end to sexual exploitation of children."

The conference was opened by Hungarian Minister of Justice Ibolya David, French Minister responsible for family, children and disabled persons Ségolène Royal, Council of Europe Director General of Legal Affairs Guy de Vel, and UNICEF Regional Director for Europe Stephen Woodhouse. It was closed by Hungarian Minister of Interior Sandor Pinter.

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