



Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on
Combating Sexual Exploitation of Children

Vienna, 18-19 October 2007

Opening Remarks by
Ambassador Christian Strohal,
Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and
Human Rights

Check against delivery!

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this meeting which is important for two reasons. First, because the issue demands the most serious attention: the health and happiness of our children today determines the kinds of societies that we will inhabit tomorrow. Security of societies is at risk where its children are exposed to exploitation. Secondly, because this issue, although touching on specialized areas of the work of my Office, such as anti-trafficking or criminal justice reform, is not in fact dealt with by any part of the Organisation in a comprehensive manner.

In preparing for this meeting, we have learnt much and have benefited from the expertise of colleagues from other international organizations and NGOs who are engaged exclusively on this topic. I am very pleased to see that they are well represented at this meeting and will, I am confident, enlighten our discussions. Let me briefly highlight some of the key challenges that lie ahead of the OSCE, as it takes the issue further.

I.

The starting point is the need for States to address the vulnerability of certain children to exploitation generally. As we know, the Brussels Ministerial Decision on combating sexual exploitation of children adopted last year makes particular reference to the commercial sexual exploitation of children including child prostitution, child trafficking and child pornography. It is clear that the factors contributing to the vulnerable situation of children to other forms of exploitation – delinquency, forced labour – are the same as those factors underpinning their vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Therefore, preventive measures need to be seriously pursued which tackle the marginalization of certain social and ethnic groups and the poverty and discrimination that give rise to their vulnerability to exploitation.

States have the responsibility to avoid the marginalization of certain groups which exposes them to new risks in their search for survival strategies, including sexual exploitation. In this context, the precarious position of migrant children, particularly those who are undocumented and unaccompanied and in need of a protective environment, needs to be addressed, since this is a group clearly identified as vulnerable to exploitation of whatever kind.

II.

A number of organisations also emphasize the vulnerability of children to commercial sexual exploitation as a result of domestic abuse: they report that a large proportion of child pornography results from crimes attributable to direct relatives of the child, a finding also reflected at the recent SPMU Expert Conference on Improving Law Enforcement Responses to Combat Sexual Exploitation of Children on the Internet (20-21st September 2007).

III.

In terms of legislation there is no shortage of international standards and activities on national level. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the *Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* only in July of this year. Tomorrow one of the members of the Committee of experts for that Convention will present to us ways in which this Convention enhances the protection afforded by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

By way of OSCE commitments, the Organisation has recognized the rights of the child and their right to special protection from violence and exploitation since the Copenhagen Meeting in 1990. This was followed in 1999 at the Summit in Istanbul where, in the Charter for European Security, participating States agreed to prevent violence against children, exploitation and trafficking. Measures have been further developed in the 2005 OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings and its addendum to address the special needs of children. Last year the Ministerial Council in Brussels urged States to take further their measures to prevent sexual exploitation of children. Action Plans and Ministerial Council decisions are, however, only as good as the political will to implement them.

IV.

Indeed, we should heed some of the lessons learnt from the fight against trafficking: we have witnessed strong efforts to introduce new criminal laws and equip law enforcement – necessary measures, no doubt, but also risking at times taking priority over the elaboration of preventive measures and the provision of adequate protection for victims. This was also one of the messages from the SPMU meeting which recognised that law enforcement cannot resolve the issue of internet pornography on its own

and that it is paramount to provide appropriate social measures alongside the identification and protection of victims.

Protection of adolescent victims can be problematic, where such individuals may be seen as anti-social rather than the victim of exploitation and abuse. The ODIHR held a roundtable in Tirana a year ago, on building capacity of Roma communities to prevent trafficking in human beings. It also emphasized the importance of tailoring social interventions to protect victims of exploitation and in particular respecting the choices and agency of adolescents by avoiding a 'one size fits all' model of protection for all minors.

V.

Finally, we need to listen to the needs of the children themselves, both in terms of developing concrete responses in individual cases and in developing appropriate policies generally. In this regard, we are glad that some of the organizations that we are supporting through our project-related activities can present some of their important work on peer to peer education and that some of the youth representatives from the ECPAT

network are also participating. We hope that all will contribute to the development of future positive action on this important issue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me finally draw your attention to two interesting side events we have scheduled for tomorrow. The first will discuss the Framework Action Protocol on Child Abuse in Bosnia and Herzegovina and will draw on the Catalan experience. The second side event will focus on underage boys in the sex industry. It will bring together researchers and NGOs from Italy, Russia, South-East Asia and the UK to present their ideas and approaches to address the issues relevant to boys in the sex industry.

In closing, I would like to thank both the Spanish Chairmanship for their support in the preparation of this meeting and Belgium, France and the United States for their initiative to bring this issue on the agenda of the OSCE.

Thank you.