

Press Release

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Commissioner for Human Rights urges Ukrainian authorities to tackle growing HIV-AIDS crisis

Strasbourg, 29.11.2006 – Ukrainian authorities need to design a comprehensive national HIV/AIDS prevention strategy and dedicate more public funding to prevent the spread of the disease, said Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights ahead of his official visit to Ukraine in mid-December.

With an approximately 1.4% prevalence rate, Ukraine is considered to be the worst affected country in Europe. UNAIDS estimates that 410,000 people are living with the infection in Ukraine, but the real number is likely to be even higher. Over one third of the people living with HIV are women of reproductive age, and every ninth registered HIV sufferer is a child. The worst-hit areas are Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk and Odessa.

"This is a very grave public health crisis, which has serious implications not only on demographics but also on the country's future economic growth," Commissioner Hammarberg said, adding that in order to control and overturn the pandemic Ukrainian authorities should tackle the problem's root causes.

"Only a comprehensive prevention strategy can stop the disease from spreading. The state should draw up an efficient national action plan, which includes broad-based awareness-raising and strong educational components," the Commissioner said. "The authorities should tackle illicit drug trafficking, drug abuse, as well as human trafficking to reduce the society's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. They should also provide effective support to the most vulnerable members of society."

"The spread of HIV/AIDS is a very serious human rights concern," the Commissioner said. "A large section of the infected population does not receive the necessary anti-retroviral treatment or psychological support. Also, HIV carriers often become victims of discrimination in the areas of medical assistance, education, as well as labour market opportunities. A vast majority becomes seriously marginalized and undermined in society."

The Commissioner will visit Ukraine between 10-17 December for a comprehensive assessment of the human rights situation. He will hold high-level talks with the authorities, parliamentarians, as well as civil society representatives, and will visit prisons, police stations, hospitals (including psychiatric hospitals) and institutions for children.

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A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 46 member states.

The agenda will include discussions on justice reform, allegations of torture and ill-treatment by the police, prison conditions, the treatment of migrants and asylum seekers and the authorities' record on fighting human trafficking. Following the visit, the Commissioner will prepare a report on the effective respect of human rights to the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly in 2007.

The Commissioner is mandated to engage in permanent dialogue with Council of Europe member states and conducts official country missions for a comprehensive evaluation of the human rights situation. The missions typically include meetings with the highest representatives of parliament, government, the judiciary, as well as representatives of leading human rights protection institutions and of civil society.

The Commissioner's reports contain both an analysis of human rights practices and detailed recommendations about possible ways of improvement. The reports are published and widely circulated in the policy-making and NGO community as well as in the media.

Ukraine has been a Council of Europe member since 1995 and ratified the European Convention on Human Rights in 1997.

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