

Press Release

Communication Unit of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Ref:394a08

Tel : +33 3 90 21 49 36

Fax : +33 3 88 41 27 51

congress.com@coe.int

www.coe.int/congress



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Child in the City: the Congress calls for local public action to be stepped up

Strasbourg, 29.05.2008 – At its Plenary Session on Wednesday 28 May, the Congress held two debates on the situation of children, addressing the question of the social reintegration of children living and/or working on the streets, and the challenge of building child-friendly cities, under the theme "Child in the city".

A report on the social reintegration of street children, by Irmeli Henttonen (Finland, ILDG), debated in the Chamber of Local Authorities, underscored that children driven to the streets by poverty, unemployment, family problems or abuse were at risk of exploitation and numerous human rights violations, sometimes from the very authorities charged with protecting them.

The Congress stressed that the unprotected situation of street children greatly heightened their vulnerability and recommended that local authorities give the issue the priority and recognition it requires. The Congress also recommended establishing a common municipal system of data collection on street children and long-term, integrated municipal action plans. It invited member states, to consider establishing a children's ombudsman or mediator and ensure that street children have access to health care, social services, education and professional training.

A second report, by Saima Kalev (Estonia, NR) dealt with the challenge of building child-friendly cities. It pointed out that towns and city centres were no longer considered to be attractive places to raise children, which led families to move out of city centres, thereby increasing urban sprawl and automobile-dependency. This trend, reinforced by current demographic changes, was weakening the economic and social vitality of towns and cities.

The Congress called on local and regional authorities to design the built environment from the child's perspective and to develop compact cities where housing, schools, child-care facilities, shops and businesses are in close proximity. It also recommended developing inter-generational public and private spaces, encouraging children's participation in decision-making, and taking an active part in the European networks "Child-Friendly Cities" and "Cities for Children".

The Congress has two chambers, the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions.

It brings together 318 full and 318 substitute members representing more than 200 000 European territorial communities.

President of the Congress : Yavuz Milden (Turkey, EPP/CD), President of the Chamber of Regions: Ludmila Sfirloaga (Romania, SOC),

President of the Chamber of Local Authorities : Ian Micallef (Malta, EPP/CD).

Political Groups : Socialist Group (SOC), Group of the European People's Party – Christian Democrats (EPP/CD),

Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG).