

Press Release

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Council of Europe Stockholm strategy for a more child-friendly Europe

Stockholm, 09.09.2008 - The high-level conference "Building a Europe for and with Children: towards a strategy for 2009-2011" opened in Stockholm.

Representatives of 42 European countries are participating in the conference, which is being organised by the Council of Europe and the Swedish Government with the support of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

"Our efforts here are all about making the Convention on the Rights of the Child a reality," said Her Majesty Queen Silvia of Sweden attending the conference. "With its strong commitment to human rights, the Council of Europe has an extremely important task in working to promote and strengthen efforts to fully implement children's rights in Europe."

The high-level conference addresses the issues of violence against children, child-friendly justice, child participation and other issues. The conference will also be the occasion of the launch of the Stockholm Strategy, which aims to strengthen work on children's rights in Council of Europe member states in 2009-2011.

"Three years ago the Council of Europe adopted the programme 'Building A Europe for and with Children'. It has had a very important and positive influence," said Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe. "Now it is time for the next step. The *Stockholm Strategy* is a strategic instrument for a more child-friendly Europe. By making a concentrated European effort, I am convinced that we can create a better, friendlier and safer Europe for all our children. But we cannot wait until tomorrow. It has to be done today."

"Creating and supporting secure conditions for children to grow up in is one of the most important things a politician can do," said Minister for Health and Social Affairs Göran Hägglund, who hosts the event. "Naturally this is done primarily through the family and at local and national level. But cooperation at European level is also required. Children's conditions and rights are one of the major issues for the future of Europe."

The proposed Stockholm strategy concerns five areas:

1. The Convention on the Rights of the Child already requires the mainstreaming of consideration of the best interests of children in political decisions, but work in this area needs to continue and deepen. To make this easier, the strategy proposes a website with easily accessible information. The strategy also advocates a family policy in accordance with the recommendations on positive parenting.
2. The countries of Europe must act jointly to combat all types of violence against young people, corporal punishment of children, sexual exploitation of children, violence in the name of honour and trafficking of 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 47 member states.

3. Children's participation must be strengthened. It is very important for a future Europe characterised by peace and development that children are given a chance at an early age to learn to understand the way democracy works.
4. Children who, for one reason or another, cannot live with their parents, children with disabilities, children who are financially and socially at risk, children who belong to national minorities and refugee children need special action.
5. The position of children in the area of justice administration should be strengthened. The child perspective must be a guiding principle when new laws are established and justice administration must become more child-friendly.

During the conference, Her Majesty Queen Silvia also signed a card in support of the elimination of corporal punishment of children, a Council of Europe initiative launched in June this year.

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