

Press Release

Council of Europe Press Division

Ref: 890a08

Tel: +33 (0)3 88 41 25 60

Fax: +33 (0)3 88 41 39 11

pressunit@coe.int

internet: www.coe.int/press



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Protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

Pushing for the Council of Europe convention to come into force in 2009

Strasbourg, 08.12.2008 – The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse provides States with a valuable tool for preventing and combating all violations of children's fundamental rights. The Council of Europe has undertaken to alert governments to the need to ensure that the convention comes into force quickly and to support them in the ratification process by means of regional conferences. The third conference will take place in Warsaw, Poland, on 15 and 16 December.

It seems that a sizeable minority of European children (10 to 20%) suffer sexual violence in the course of their childhood. There is even greater acknowledgement that this problem exists now that the spread of the Internet has spawned new offences. Poland is not immune. In September, in the course of a large-scale police operation covering the entire country, the Polish police took 138 people suspected of possessing paedophilic images and disseminating them on the Internet in for questioning.

The Council of Europe convention will do much to strengthen international co-operation, which is essential for prosecuting the perpetrators of such offences and putting an end to impunity, regardless of the country where the offence is committed. The convention is, moreover, the only treaty in the world to consider "grooming" (where adults seek to enter into contact with children or adolescents for sexual purposes, for example through chat rooms) a criminal offence.

It is therefore of prime importance that as many governments as possible follow the example of the 32 countries that have already signed the convention, so that it can come into force in 2009.

The Council of Europe has made the promotion of children's rights and the protection of children against violence a priority, as is borne out by the programme "Building a Europe for and with children" (2006-2008). A game called "Wild Web Woods", now available in 20 languages, enables children to learn to surf the Internet safely.

The conference, which is open to the press, will begin at 10 am on Monday 15 December (Sofitel Victoria, Warsaw).

For further information, see www.coe.int/childprotection.

Press contacts:

In Warsaw: Hanna Machinska, Council of Europe Information Office, tel. +48 22 853 57 73, hanna.machinska@coe.int

In Strasbourg: Estelle Steiner, Press Officer, tel. +33 3 88 41 33 35, mobile +33 6 08 46 01 57, estelle.steiner@coe.int

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