

Press Release

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Unaccompanied minors and forced returns focus of migration seminar in Strasbourg

Strasbourg, 19.02.2009 – The issue of forced returns and ways of reinforcing the protection of migrant minors is the focus of a two-day seminar that opened today in Strasbourg.

During the first plenary session, the participants examined the migratory cycle of unaccompanied minor migrants (UMMs), with the aim of identifying ways to protect and promote the interests and to create the best life prospects for estimated 100,000 UMMs living in Europe.

"I am convinced that it is necessary for the Council of Europe to systematise the entire standard-setting arsenal within a binding legal framework that could also serve as a "model agreement" for countries regarding the reception and return of unaccompanied minors. The Council of Europe is very well placed to initiate more in-depth discussion in this area, and make a difference," said Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, opening the conference.

"What we must always bear in mind, regardless of circumstances and legal status, is that migrant unaccompanied minors are first and foremost children. They need, they deserve – and they must be given – our full attention and unconditional assistance," she added.

Touching on the second topic of the seminar, Corien Jonker, President of the PACE Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, said it was important to work towards a sound and realistic return policy in Europe.

"Most of our member states do not want to work yet on the fact that in the future we will need more migrants from third countries in Europe. Not having a proper return policy for those who are not entitled to asylum is not an option," she emphasised.

In his remarks, Prof. Jean François Mattéi, President of the French Red Cross stressed that the number of international migrants is rising faster than the world population of which it represents nearly 3%. Put together, those 3% would virtually form the 5th biggest country in the world of which some 30 to 40 million migrants or 15 to 20% of the world migrant population are in an illegal situation.

"We must speak for those who no longer have a voice, we must reach out to those whom some people do not wish to see because they are "illegals". We must do everything to protect them in what makes our humanity: their human dignity," he said.

The event, jointly organised by the French Red Cross Organisation and the Council of Europe, is attended by the delegates from some 60 national organisations of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Society, government representatives, parliamentarians, independent experts, representatives of various international institutions and NGOs.

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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.

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Final conclusions of the seminar will be presented at a press conference scheduled at 11.30 on Friday 20 February (Room 1, Palais de l' Europe).

Speakers will include:

**Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe,
and Prof. Jean François Mattéi, President of the French Red Cross**

**The press conference will be webcast live on the Internet at
<http://tv.coe.int/internet/presslive.html>**

More information: [Special file on migration](#) and [Croix-Rouge française](#)

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