

Press Release

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Toledo conference calls on states to guarantee full access of children to justice

Toledo (Spain), 13.03.2009 – Representatives of Council of Europe member states and experts, who have met in an international conference in Toledo 12-13 March, today agreed on a number of recommendations to states which aim to improve the protection of children in European judicial systems.

The participants called on states to guarantee access of children to justice, and ratify and implement all key international treaties protecting children. They also urged them to:

- Prohibit all forms of violence against children and making its prevention a priority
- End impunity of offenders, establishing national jurisdiction over offences against children committed abroad and, for sexual offences, ensuring a period of time for initiating proceedings after the victim has reached the adult age
- Create national plans to promote children's rights, taking into account the roles, needs and responsibilities of sectors such as education, justice, health, social policies and the business community

With regard to the role of the private sector in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse of children, they called on states to:

- Require information technology industries, in particular Internet Service Providers (ISPs), mobile phone companies and search engines to cooperate with law enforcement agencies on child pornography cases, and to inform users about the criminal sanctions related
- Oblige ISPs to retain traffic data for a fixed period of time in order to assist international investigations under judicial supervision
- Raise parents' awareness of the risks of the Internet for children, such as grooming
- Require travel, tourism and hotel industries to join the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children in Travel and Tourism, and to inform clients in brochures, in-flight magazines and hotel rooms that they can be prosecuted for engaging in sexual activities with a child

The conference also made recommendations to the Council of Europe group of experts that will draft the European guidelines on child-friendly justice, such as the following:

- Judges, psychologists, lawyers and other professionals dealing with children in justice should be trained on appropriate interviews methods for children and intersectorial co-operation should be encouraged
- Repeated interviews and confrontation between the child witness with offenders should be avoided; and options such as video recording should be promoted
- Children should be informed on each stage of the judicial procedure
- Judges should take into consideration all specific needs of the child and possible conflicting best interests of children
- Children who testify should be protected from media exposure
- Alternative dispute resolution and means of restorative justice should be favoured

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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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The conference was jointly organised by the Council of Europe and the Spanish Ministry of Justice within the programme of the Spanish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the organisation.

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