

24 March 2014

**Growing with children's rights  
A conference on the implementation  
of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights  
of the Child 2012-2015**

**27 – 28 March 2014, Dubrovnik (Croatia)**

**Speaking notes for Johan van den HOUT  
Congress Thematic Spokesperson for Children**

- Local and regional authorities have a key responsibility, along with national governments, to protect and promote citizens' human rights, which includes safeguarding and promoting the safety and welfare of children and young people;
- The services that are needed to help victims of sexual violence and abuse are provided, in the main, at the local level. This is also the level where preventive and awareness-raising measures can be most effective;
- Local and regional authorities are therefore on the frontline of the fight to stop sexual violence against children and must develop and implement action plans and strategies to deal with and prevent future cases;
- To guide local and regional authorities in their fight against sexual exploitation and abuse, the Congress devised a Pact of Towns and Regions to Stop Sexual Violence against Children. We have basically translated the Lanzarote Convention, as it can be implemented by these tiers of government, into a list of policies and practical initiatives in order to develop child-friendly services, protect children and help prevent sexual violence within the community;
- These suggestions for action range from simply putting information on the Council of Europe's ONE in FIVE Campaign on municipalities' websites, to setting up multi-disciplinary structures along the lines of Iceland's Children's House model, or the Centre for Child Protection in Zagreb which has committed to our Pact;
- On my visits to raise visibility of the Campaign and the Pact, I have come across some very simple but effective tools used by local authorities which can easily be copied by

other towns, such as the small, pocket-sized checklist of warning signs to look out for issued by Liverpool City Council and Merseyside Police to all of their staff. Or the action by a Cypriot NGO whereby children were given the possibility to design and produce fridge magnets delivering their own message to their peers on how to protect oneself from violence;

- As Congress Thematic Spokesperson on Children, it is my role to raise awareness of municipal councils and regional parliaments of the Pact. I encourage them to sign up to it and implement its provisions;
- With 200,000 municipalities and regions in the 47 member states, this is no easy task. Last year, I met mayors, council leaders and members, and regional ministers in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Belgium, and this year I will travel to Austria, Czech Republic and Germany. Each time I take part in conferences or meetings, I try to meet with political leaders;
- Thus far, thirty-two towns, regions and organisations have signed the Pact, including Liverpool while I was there last December, and several Swiss communes thanks to Mme Maury-Pasquier's concerted efforts in her country. A decision from the Senate of Berlin is imminent following a positive vote in the Berlin State House of Representatives last October to commit to the Pact;
- We have created a Pact Toolkit which has now been translated into 22 languages, and will soon be available to download from the Congress's ONE in FIVE internet site, you will find copies available here;
- Unfortunately, the Congress has neither the financial nor the human resources to implement a large-scale awareness-raising campaign in all 47 member states. This is why we are looking for ways to bring the national associations of local and regional authorities on board. They will be invaluable partners in giving visibility to the Pact and the ONE in FIVE Campaign. While in the UK, I heard very good things about the action of the Local Government Association and I have contacted them to see if we can cooperate;
- The ONE in FIVE Campaign is scheduled to end next December however, due to the crucial role played by local and regional authorities in combatting sexual violence and abuse of children, the Congress will necessarily continue its efforts to promote the Pact and its implementation in 2015 and beyond.
- Thank you for your attention.