

**Expert Consultation in Preparation for
World Congress III on Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents
Florence, 21 April 2008**

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

1. I am delighted to welcome you all to Florence and to this important meeting devoted to the promotion of children's rights, in the specific context of child trafficking and sexual exploitation of children.

It is indeed a pleasure to see with us today so many friends and partners with whom we have had the pleasure of working over the years on these critical areas. We look forward to learning from your strong expertise and experience and to benefit from your insightful suggestions and recommendations. We hope this meeting will provide also a special opportunity to consolidate further our collaboration with all of you.

This meeting is a momentous occasion for UNICEF and the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. It constitutes a remarkable forum with distinguished guests from around the world, representing a wide diversity of experiences and backgrounds and joining hands around a common aim – seizing the unique opportunity provided by the World Congress III against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, which will be held later this year, we are all committed to enhance the safeguard of children's rights and ensure the effective protection of children from all forms of violence including sexual abuse and exploitation.

In the context of the discussions that will follow, we have a privileged occasion to review progress achieved since Yokohama, to take stock of significant developments and initiatives, reflect on lessons

from success and challenging bottlenecks, to re-energize and mobilize political will and action, and also to anticipate priority themes and dimensions the Brazil Congress will be in a position to address.

The discussions of the next few days will also be an opportunity to move forward the strategic agenda shaped by the UN Study on Violence against Children, conducted under the leadership of Professor Paulo Pinheiro, a remarkable and well known Brazilian human rights expert and a reference in this area.

Brazil is clearly at the centre of our reflections and it is with particular pleasure that I would like to welcome to our meeting the representatives of the Government of Brazil, who will be hosting the Congress later this year and will lead its preparatory process in the months ahead. It is also with a particular pleasure that I acknowledge the presence with us of the representatives of the Government of Sweden. With the organization of the first World Congress, Sweden helped to place child sexual exploitation and abuse high in the international and national agendas. Since then it has been steadily associated with initiatives designed to protect children against these human rights violations.

Leading international and regional organizations are also with us today, with their unique expertise, standard-setting work and long lasting commitment to these issues. We are delighted to have you all with us and to anticipate an inspiring opportunity to benefit from your insightful contributions and recommendations. I would like to acknowledge the presence and decisive contribution of two other members of the Organizing Committee, ECPAT and the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We look forward to continuing to work closely with you in the important upcoming stages of the preparatory process of the Brazil Congress.

I also take the opportunity to extend my special thanks to the Japan Committee for UNICEF. The Committee has played a critical role in the promotion of advocacy and policy debate for the prevention of sexual exploitation of children; it is the main funding agency supporting The Code organization, which promotes corporate social responsibility of the tourism industry to protect children from sexual exploitation. Moreover, the Japan Committee is a key partner of our Research Centre and also a key supporter of the Innocenti studies that will be presented during the coming days.

Dear Friends, it is a real pleasure to welcome the participation of all of you representing governments, UN Agencies, inter-governmental organizations, expert bodies, international and national NGOs, as well as the private sector.

It is a great honour to greet you and to wish you well for your stay in Florence. And it is wonderful to anticipate, through your strong contribution, long and engaged experience, an excellent and enriching meeting that can help make a difference in the life of children.

2. A holistic and evidence based approach

In the overall context of UNICEF's support to the Brazil Congress, we are committed to promote the consideration of a holistic and evidence based approach to the safeguard of children's rights and the protection of children from sexual exploitation. The expert discussions that will follow are guided by these concerns. We hope they will be supportive of the further development of the Congress agenda and of the call for action the Congress is expected to adopt. At the same time, the discussions of the next few days will be decisive to consolidate, enrich and validate our own research findings and, together with you, identify emerging issues and priority concerns where we will need to focus our future work.

As will be discussed in more detail in the session this morning, our research on child trafficking is promoted in the context of the implementation of international standards on the rights of the child and constitutes a critical component of IRC's work. In the early 2000s, we embarked on a comprehensive study of child trafficking in Africa. With this initial research we started to gain a deeper understanding of the distinct nature of this phenomenon, of efforts to prevent it, of the urgency to put in place protective measures and to assist trafficked children; by the same token, we have increasingly learned about the process and challenges of data collection and analysis in such a complex area.

Later, our Centre turned its attention to Europe. Our recent study on child trafficking in 50 European countries is an amazing glimpse into a broad and diverse region. From Europe we joined hands with partners in South Asia, and a series of reports will be published later this year. South Asia is rich, with experience in advocacy and policy development, in programming and commitment to the prevention of child trafficking and to assisting victims of trafficking; we will be discussing some of these good practices the next few days.

Across regions, we have been confronted with one important challenge – in spite of the growing attention being given to this phenomenon, the numbers of trafficked children cannot, in truth, be determined with precision. To date, children who are officially returned to their home countries are few in number. Fewer still are the numbers of prosecuted traffickers. One of the biggest lessons that we take from the research is that efforts need to be stepped up to prevent the exploitation of children and young people. It is difficult to identify children at risk and harder still to help child victims rebuild their lives once exploitation has taken place. Strangely enough, this reminds us of efforts in health and nutrition, where preventative approaches are pursued with increased priority, alongside curative ones.

More recently, our study on the prevention of sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism shows some commonalities with child trafficking as it involves the movement of persons for the

purpose of child exploitation, often commercial sexual exploitation. When this movement occurs across borders, it poses particular challenges to child protection and to the prosecution of perpetrators.

Our research findings provide insights, offer ideas and experiences and allow us to revisit, adjust and refine perceptions, as well as research methods and tools. Some findings are common around the world; others are unique for a country or a region. But all of them are invaluable to our evolving understanding of the plight of children in the complex universe of trafficking; all remain a reference for promoting effective approaches guided by the best interests of the child.

Partnerships have been critical to move this process forward. They lay the foundation for the research, give it a space for application; and they provide a momentum beyond the writing of a report, generating advocacy, policy making and programme development.

With all of you we have a timely opportunity to discuss the findings and recommendations as they have emerged from our studies on child trafficking and sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism. We hope to provide a synthesis of where we are and reflect together on what can be considered the accumulated knowledge and experience of our work to date. We look forward to stimulating discussions on lessons learned and ways of translating them into key recommendations that may feed into the agenda of the upcoming Brazil World Congress against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents.

The richness of this agenda explains how pleased we are to welcome you to Florence. Your active participation and cooperation are critical to make these three days a success and to develop evidence-informed and thoughtful recommendations for the Congress. Let us grasp this important moment of planning and preparation for the Brazil World Congress to bring together our knowledge and experience, to jointly provide expertise and creativity in new approaches and consideration of emerging issues; let us also use it to challenge ourselves on what our future courses of action should be.

For the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre it is a very special honour to host the first expert thematic consultation in preparation for this important global event. Do count on our full support to make it a strong success! Thank you for joining us in this fantastic journey.