

**Florence Thematic Consultation on
International Cooperation for Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation of
Children and Adolescents:
the Role of the International Actor and Donors
23 and 24 October 2008**

The Florence Thematic Consultation has been co-convened by the Government of Italy, and the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. For the Government of Italy, sexual exploitation of children is a matter of grave concern, and holds an important place in the national legal and political framework. Sexual exploitation is a cornerstone of the development cooperation strategy of the Government of Italy, and there are a host of Italian-funded efforts to protect children from sexual exploitation the world over. For UNICEF and the research conducted by the Innocenti Centre, the safeguard of children's rights and the protection of children from all forms of violence, including sexual exploitation, remain critical, priority areas.

A remarkable group of experts came together in Florence to address the role of international cooperation in the protection of children from sexual exploitation. Participants ranged from representatives of governmental authorities and mechanisms, academics, media, civil society organizations, development cooperation actors, representatives of regional and sub-regional institutions, and national independent institutions on child rights. With strong professional backgrounds and knowledge about cooperation at international, regional and national levels, they shared their experience in safeguarding children's rights, with a particular emphasis on the protection of children from all forms of violence, including sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

The Florence consultation addressed dimensions of international cooperation as one of five themes in the upcoming Rio Congress. All of the discussions in the consultation were framed by the findings and recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children. International cooperation is also a driving force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) and a special feature of its implementation process. Indeed the Convention has also generated an innovative process of international solidarity, technical advice and assistance in favour of the realization of children's rights.

Regional standards, including the comprehensive and innovative Lanzarote Convention adopted by the Council of Europe, were central to reflections in the consultation. Among other key aspects, of the Lanzarote Convention provides a strong foundation for effective prevention, criminalization, investigation, and prosecution of offences concerning sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. Provision is also made for the protection of child victims, and for the promotion of international cooperation.

The consultation discussed the ways in which the Rio Congress can become a real turning point in the prevention of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, in the consolidated establishment and strengthening of child protection systems. Discussants looked at ways in which development cooperation agencies can refine the mainstreaming of children's rights in their development strategies, while acting in a coordinated manner that capitalizes on synergies and commitment to children's rights. They examined ways in which existing mechanisms and indicators are well equipped to assess the extent to which priority attention is being given to child sexual exploitation in the overall spectrum of international cooperation activities. *Impact* was also a focus of the consultation with thoughtful deliberations about the way in which efforts actually affect the real lives of children, and the enjoyment of their rights. Importantly, there was also a dialogue about the anticipated follow-up to Rio, and how to take forward and mainstream the commitments made in Brazil, and to use the Congress proceedings as a baseline against which to monitor progress at the national, regional and international levels.

Background

The Government of Brazil will host the World Congress III Against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents from 25-28 November 2008 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Congress will build on the commitments made at the first and second World Congresses against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Stockholm 1996 and Yokohama 2001) and the States Parties obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000). This process also benefits from follow-up to the UN GA Special Session on Children (2002) and the UN Study on Violence Against Children (2006).

The Congress envisages mobilizing all countries to guarantee the right of children and adolescents to be protected from sexual exploitation by taking action to:

- Promote sharing and cross-fertilization of experiences by governments, international organizations, independent institutions, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, NGOs, and others;
- Examine what works in different regions and identify channels to facilitate better exchange of experiences;
- Open channels and secure greater international cooperation on key issues (including cross-border, but also inter- and intra-regional cooperation);
- Examine persisting and new challenges and dimensions of sexual exploitation, and set more targeted strategies and measures to address them building on work achieved;
- Catalyze a systemic and inter-sectoral approach to guarantee children's and adolescents' right to be protected from sexual exploitation;
- Recommend follow-up action for the Congress.

In order to facilitate the implementation of the objectives of the World Congress III Against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, the Congress partners and members of the Planning Committee (The Government of Brazil, UNICEF, ECPAT and the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child) are commissioning a background paper on each of the thematic areas of the Congress. A number of thematic and expert consultations addressing key issues and aspects of sexual exploitation will be conducted in preparation for the Congress, including on various forms of sexual exploitation, legal frameworks, the role of the private sector and international cooperation.

Objectives of the Florence Consultation:

The consultation was designed to promote discussions and establish conceptual clarity on a rights based approach to child protection issues, including those relevant in the context of sexual exploitation of children and very particular it was designed to create awareness and mobilize governments, donor agencies and other actors to:

- Share positive experiences and initiatives promoted in the context of international cooperation to protect children from sexual exploitation;
- Address issues of relevance for the development of the thematic paper on "International Cooperation Strategies" in preparation for the World Congress III Theme 5;
- Provide recommendations for the World Congress III, including on the role of international cooperation and donors and other international actors to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation of children and adolescents beyond the World Congress.

The Consultation highlighted that the III World Congress in Rio is the re-launching of a journey that will steer us towards children's freedom from sexual exploitation, and from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation.