

**Thematic Expert Consultation on
*International Cooperation for Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation of Children and
Adolescents: the Role of International Actors and Donors***

**Florence, 23-24 October 2008
Marta Santos Pais, Director, UNICEF IRC**

Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear Friends

1. I am very pleased to welcome you to Florence and to this important Consultation on the role of international cooperation in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.

It is a real honour to join hands with the Italian Government in the organization of this meeting, which addresses a central dimension of the agenda of the Third World Congress against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, which will be held in November, in Rio de Janeiro.

On behalf of UNICEF and of the Innocenti Research Centre I would like to thank the Government of Italy and Minister Renzo Rosso very especially, for the decisive support provided to the organization of this meeting and more broadly to our work in favour of the realization of children's rights.

2. We have with us today a remarkable group of distinguished experts. Working together at international, regional and national levels, representing a rich diversity of backgrounds, bringing a long and valuable experience in a wide range of areas, we are gathered here around a shared commitment: to seize the opportunity provided by the Brazil Congress to enhance the safeguard of children's rights with a particular emphasis on the protection of children from all forms of violence, including sexual abuse and exploitation.

It is a real pleasure to welcome so many friends and partners, with whom we have had the pleasure of working together over the years on these critical areas. We look forward to learning from your expertise and contributions, and to benefiting from your insightful suggestions and recommendations. And we hope this meeting will provide a special opportunity to consolidate further our collaboration with all of you.

I am delighted to welcome to our meeting the General Rapporteur for the Brazil Congress, Professor Jaap Doek. Jaap Doek is well known for his role in the development of the international children's rights agenda – including as a Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

We look forward to benefiting from Jaap Doek's advice and inspiration. His participation in our meeting is a strong reassurance that our discussions will remain closely linked with the agenda of the Brazil Congress, and the recommendations arising from this Thematic Consultation will make a decisive contribution to the outcome of the Rio Congress itself.

3. The Florence Consultation addresses the dimension of international cooperation, one of the five core themes of the Brazil Congress and a topic which was also highlighted by the previous Congresses, in Stockholm and Yokohama. This ensures that our meeting is framed and will reaffirm the important **commitments undertaken at the two previous Congresses**. In addition, we anticipate that the Brazil Congress will move vigorously forward in advancing those commitments.

Today's meeting, and the Brazil Congress itself, are in addition framed by the findings and recommendations of the **UN Study on Violence against Children**. And they build upon the **legal obligations undertaken by States Parties** upon their ratification of relevant international and regional children's rights treaties.

4. The Florence Thematic Consultation is the third expert meeting promoted by the Innocenti Research Centre in the lead up to the Congress in Brazil. Understandably, therefore, today's meeting is closely linked with the two previous initiatives.

Indeed, today's Consultation builds upon the **Innocenti Expert meeting held last April**, in Florence, in which several of you have taken part. Many of the overall recommendations adopted in April maintain a strong relevance for our discussions today – these include:

- the need to envisage the protection of children from sexual exploitation in the broad context of the safeguard of children's rights;
- the imperative to pursue solutions that are guided by the best interests of the child, aimed at children's protection from discrimination and developed in consideration of children's views and perspectives;
- the importance of investing in prevention including through the consolidation of national protection systems;
- and the need to set in place effective mechanisms for cross border, regional and international cooperation.

b) Today's Consultation also builds upon the **Thematic Consultation on Legal Framework and Enforcement**, organized with the Swiss Government and UNICEF Swiss National Committee, just a few days ago, in Bern. Legal Framework and Enforcement is another core theme of the Brazil Congress and one where, once again, the dimensions of cross border, regional and international cooperation gain a very high visibility. To confirm the inherent relevance of these dimensions for our reflections, it would be sufficient to recall the recommendations agreed upon in Bern with regard to:

- the ratification of relevant international legal instruments –including the Optional Protocol to the CRC and the Lanzarote Convention of the Council of Europe;

- the enactment of extra territorial legislation
- and the consideration of mutual judicial assistance mechanisms.

5. The promotion of international cooperation for the safeguard of human rights is a central thrust of the **United Nations Charter** and it is at the heart of the implementation of human rights treaties. International cooperation is also a driving force in the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** and a special feature of its implementation process. Indeed, the Convention specifically addresses international cooperation in a number of its provisions, including in the specific context of children's right to protection from all forms of exploitation. The Convention has also generated an innovative process of international solidarity, technical advice and assistance in favour of the realization of children's rights.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child plays an instrumental role in this process. We are therefore delighted to have with us today a member of the Committee, Luigi Citarella, who will help mainstream our discussions in the broad framework of the implementation of the Convention.

Regional standards, including the comprehensive and innovative Convention of Lanzarote adopted by the Council of Europe, will be at the centre of our reflections. As extensively debated a week ago in the Bern Thematic Consultation, this Convention provides a strong foundation for the effective prevention of the sexual exploitation and abuse of children, for the criminalization, investigation and prosecution of these offenses, for the protection of child victims, and for the promotion of international cooperation. The Convention is particularly important as it is also open to the accession of countries which are not Members of the Council of Europe. For this reason, one strong recommendation agreed upon in Bern is to call on all countries to consider adhering to this treaty, so that it can enter into force as soon as possible.

Italy played a decisive role in the drafting of the Convention and remains particularly active in the promotion of its principles and provisions. We are therefore delighted to have with us some of the leading experts who contributed to this process.

6. As was the case with the various Regional and other thematic consultations organized in the preparatory process of the Rio World Congress, the Florence Consultation will focus on international cooperation and will be an opportunity to reflect together on progress made in this area since Yokohama, while sharing good practices and experiences, capturing emerging opportunities and concerns, and anticipating areas where a decisive difference can be made in the protection of children from all forms of violence, including sexual exploitation.

Such a difference can only be realistically made with the involvement of all relevant actors, at the national, regional and international levels. We are therefore delighted to have amongst our speakers

- leading representatives of governmental authorities and mechanisms, who have a primary responsibility in this process;
- national independent institutions on children's rights, who are critical advocates and spokespersons on behalf of children's best interests;

- civil society organizations who play a critical role in the promotion of children's rights and in social mobilization efforts;
- academics, with a well known commitment in promoting evidence based policies;
- representatives from regional and sub regional institutions, including in Africa and the European region
- as well as excellent experts involved with development cooperation initiatives for the protection of children from sexual exploitation and for the mobilization of resources in support of that agenda.

We are delighted that a significant part of our agenda will be devoted to presentation and reflection upon very concrete and successful illustrations of programmes aimed at the protection of children from all forms of violence, including in the context of trafficking, sexual exploitation, and travel and tourism. We have well known experts who will introduce these discussions, amongst them an exceptional group of experts associated with the Italian Development Cooperation. Your contributions will no doubt provide an excellent basis to draw upon for the discussions that will take place in Rio, at the end of November.

7. In the course of our discussions, we look forward to a rich and enriching exchange of views and cross-fertilization of experiences, and also to a reflection on strategic action-oriented recommendations that will help inform the outcome document expected to be agreed upon in Rio de Janeiro. The working group sessions that have been anticipated for tomorrow are designed to provide the space for such reflections.

Our Consultation is a golden opportunity to reflect on how the Congress in Brazil can become a real *turning point* in the prevention of sexual exploitation of children and in the consolidation of systems of child protection.

For this reason, we very much look forward to reflecting with all of you on

- how international, regional and cross border cooperation can be further strengthened to enhance the safeguard of children's rights and their protection from sexual exploitation;
- How development cooperation agencies can refine the mainstreaming of children's rights in their development strategies, and act in a coordinated and synergistic manner;
- How can we refine existing mechanisms and indicators to assess the extent to which priority attention is given to this area in the overall spectrum of international cooperation activities, and the real impact these interventions have on the improvement of children's living conditions and their enjoyment of human rights;
- What follow up process should we anticipate to make sure that the Brazil commitments will be carried through and used as a baseline for monitoring progress in the future?

Together with all of you, we have a strategic opportunity to reflect on these critical dimensions, and develop a solid contribution to the Brazil Congress.

Combining the sound expertise you all bring, with our shared commitment to make a visible difference in the protection of children from all forms of violence, including from sexual exploitation, we can only anticipate a very successful Consultation.

Together we will make of the Rio Congress not only an important Third World Congress but also the starting point of a journey that will steer us towards children's freedom from sexual exploitation!