

**Speaking notes for Mr Frank Fahey
Deputy of the *Dáil Éireann* and
Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly**

**representing the Parliamentary Assembly
at the opening session of the Launch of the Council of Europe Campaign
to stop sexual violence against children**

*Complesso Monumentale di San Michele a Ripa Grande
Rome, 28-29 November 2010*

Dear Ministers,
Dear Deputy Secretary General,
Dear Excellencies,
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

As Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly, I would first of all like to convey the best wishes of success to the organisers of this event on behalf of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Mr Mevlüt Çavusoglu, who regrets that he was not in a position to accept the invitation himself. The Parliamentary Assembly not only wishes you success for this conference aimed at launching the Council of Europe Campaign to Stop Sexual Violence against Children, but wishes us all success for the implementation of the Campaign itself, which we all hope will have a true impact on the promotion of Council of Europe standards relating to child protection and on the protection and well-being of our children.

I am honoured to accept the invitation on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly to address this conference today, having held the office of Minister of State in Ireland with special responsibility for Children from 1997 till 2000. The Parliamentary Assembly, its national delegations, and individual parliamentarians are most concerned by the issues addressed today: the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Such abuse of children occurs far too often and is a shameful mark on our "modern societies" which can otherwise be so proud of the progress made in many political and social areas.

My own country, Ireland, was obliged to face this issue in recent years and tried to do so in the most transparent manner possible: as you all may know, the Irish society had to deal with numerous cases of child abuse committed by members of the clergy, that occurred in particular between the 1950s and the 1970s in Catholic institutions. These offences were dealt with in highly visible inquiries, the results of which were published under the well-known Ferns (2005), Murphy and Ryan reports (2009), amongst others. These inquiries and their outcomes allowed a great number of victims to speak up, to accuse perpetrators who were then judged and to receive compensation for the harm that was inflicted upon them, harm that very often influenced their lives far into adulthood. Without wanting to spend more time on this painful experience now, I would like to invite all countries represented at this conference and their authorities to face issues of child abuse in the same courageous and transparent manner. We need to ensure that children are fully protected in order to prevent abuse, and we need to give full justice to victims once abuse has occurred. Only by approaching the problem openly and without reserve, will we be able to create an overall awareness and social context where no member of society will close their eyes when it comes to a phenomenon that concerns us all and that happens daily in our children's "circles of trust".

I am convinced that national parliaments are amongst the key players at national level when it comes to strengthening legislation and implementing higher standards of child protection. For the Parliamentary Assembly and most of its delegations, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, the so-called Lanzarote Convention, is the key instrument of this campaign. Today, we would like to follow the example of the previous Campaign to combat Trafficking in Human Beings, where parliamentary action has clearly been at the origin of further ratifications of the Convention on Action to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, and stimulate further signatures, ratifications and steps taken towards the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention by as many member states as possible. We will do this through committed action at European and national level.

I will leave it to my colleagues, Carina Ohlsson and Marlene Rupprecht, who will speak at different sessions of this conference, to provide you with further information on the contribution that the Parliamentary Assembly and national parliaments will make.

An important tool for our contribution will be the network of contact parliamentarians which is already represented at this event by some of its newly appointed members. I therefore have the pleasure to announce that the Parliamentary Assembly is today represented by 11 of its members (including myself) and 3 contact parliamentarians (who are other members of national parliaments), and believe that this in itself is an indicator of the strong commitment that will characterise our efforts during the upcoming campaign.

It is with this commitment that the Parliamentary Assembly will initiate and organise reporting processes and debates related to the sexual abuse of children during the next few years in order to raise awareness of the issue, increase the visibility of already existing common standards under the Lanzarote Convention and contribute to the implementation of these standards through concrete proposals for political and legislative action. In so doing, the Assembly will work in close cooperation with the governmental sector of the Council of Europe. Only joint action between the different pillars of our organisation, the Council of Europe, and the other stakeholders involved (including the children themselves) will lead to satisfying results and a true impact of European action at national level.

Let us unite to combat sexual violence against children. This event is not the starting point of a glamorous campaign, given that its object is a painful one. It is a starting point for joint action, under a renewed sense of urgency, in favour of some of the most vulnerable members of our society. I would like to thank you for your attention and wish us all an excellent conference and exchanges that will be fruitful for the well-being of our children!