

Council of Europe campaign to stop sexual violence against children – High level launching event *Rome, Italy, 29-30 November 2010*

Presentation by Ms Carina Ohlsson, Swedish MP

"The role of the Parliamentary Assembly and national parliaments of the Council of Europe in promoting the Lanzarote Convention"

Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,
I feel very honoured to take part in this important event today. As a Member of the Swedish Parliament and Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on Children of the Parliamentary Assembly, I will focus on the general role this body and the national parliaments play in promoting the Lanzarote Convention.

The well-being of children is a potent indicator of the effective functioning of a welfare society. The decisions that adults take and their way of living have a direct impact on children. The result of this campaign will depend on the hard work of many people representing various categories of society. As a parliamentarian I want to underline the importance of strong legislation in this field. Strong laws are the tools of political decision-making at national level. At regional level we work through conventions to move forward.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is committed to taking an active part in this campaign, not least through its Sub-Committee on children which I chair. The Parliamentary Assembly has recently taken action against sexual child abuse by adopting its Recommendation 1934 (2010) on "Child abuse in institutions: ensure full protection of the victims". Here, it notably recommends to strengthen national legislation, for example by providing for *ex officio* prosecution in cases of child abuse, by ensuring coherent prescription periods under civil and criminal law or by making police clearance certificates compulsory for professionals and voluntary staff working closely with children. Over the next few years, the Assembly will produce further in-depth reports on various issues related to the sexual abuse of children and organise debates at European and national level, in order to help raise awareness for this issue and the importance of strengthening national legislation with a view to preventing the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and improving the protection of children who have been abused.

Not only the adoption, but also the implementation of legislation is a crucial factor when dealing with such difficult issues as sexual violence against children. Anyone involved in the questioning of children who were recently exposed to assaults, must have in-depth knowledge of the problem and approach their job with appropriate sensitivity. Here, the role of national parliaments is to help develop national programmes and action plans and to share them at a European level, so as to help other countries progress in this matter. Together, we need to develop methods that are efficient in fighting the sexual abuse of children but at the same time always keep the focus on the child. The importance of effective cooperation between the police, social services, health care and prosecution services can not be overestimated. In this context I would like to mention an example of "good practice" from my own country, Sweden. In some of Sweden's major cities we have established umbrella institutions called the Children's Advocacy Centres. The idea

behind them is that the child will meet all four institutions/agencies involved in the same building - the police, social services, health care providers and the prosecutor – and will not be “handed over” from one office to the next. *(We may compare this approach to the story presented by Gaël. He had to tell his story nine times to different agents. This shows the importance of creating a child-friendly environment).*

Vulnerable children that have been exposed to sexual violence need support not only during a legal process but also once it has been concluded. *(This can again be compared to the story of Gaël. He also said that support is extremely important after a traumatizing court hearing).* The final responsibility to follow-up on the child’s well-being should lie with the state but, of course, day to day responsibility lies with all of us to react and act in every possible way we can. The Parliamentary Assembly will also do so through its network of contact parliamentarians dedicated to the present campaign on which you will hear more from my colleague, Marlene Rupprecht, later today. As one of the members of this network, I can assure you that the Parliamentary Assembly and the national parliamentarians it represents, feel honoured to be partners of the campaign launched today and to make sure that, through joint action, we make significant and visible progress in fighting the sexual abuse of children.