

Florence declaration 17 November 2011

In our capacity as parliamentarians members of the Council of Europe Network of Contact Parliamentarians to stop sexual violence against children,

Who have convened in Florence today, at the invitation of the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in the Istituto degli Innocenti for the 5th meeting of the network in 2011 to advance combating sexual violence against children:

CONVINCED that following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000) which stand as the landmark instruments for the protection of children and adolescents, the Council of Europe has today become a leading player in this battle;

UPHOLDING the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (known as the Lanzarote Convention) as the first legal instrument requiring governments to criminalise all forms of sexual violence by adults against children;

MINDFUL of the fact that sexual violence against children has taken on dramatic dimensions. Official figures indicate that one child in five has fallen prey to it in various forms: sexual abuse; sexual exploitation through "child pornography"; prostitution; solicitation via the Internet (grooming); corruption of children; sexual assault by peers;

CONVINCED of the need to pool the efforts, also at the international level, of a maximum number of States in Europe and throughout the world with their parliaments, governments and civil society, as called for by the ONE in FIVE Campaign launched by the Council of Europe;

LOOKING AHEAD to Universal Children's Day on 20 November 2011,

WE HEREBY UNDERTAKE

1) to ensure that each of our countries determinedly combat the root causes of what we consider to be one of the most heinous crimes and one of the most serious violations of human rights;

2) to ensure that each State which we represent signs, ratifies and implements the Lanzarote Convention as soon as possible;

3) to ensure that the measures adopted to combat these crimes involve all the institutional players and everyone working in civil society in non-governmental organisations and associations, as well as the private sector, families and children themselves;

4) to invite the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a thematic report on sexual violence against children, and to take this issue into account during his visits to various countries;

5) to suggest that the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly devotes a current affairs debate to this issue within next year's agenda, also on the basis of the possible aforementioned report by the Human Rights Commissioner;

6) to request that the Council of Europe organises an international conference on the occasion of 20 November 2012 – Universal Children's Day – to disseminate national good practices, with the specific contribution of the national child rights institutions of the Council of Europe member States and in order to launch a joint pan-European Action Plan.

Mindful of the importance and the difficulty of this commitment, we, members of the network of contact parliamentarians, appeal to parliamentarians and experts from the whole of Europe, to civil society and associations, to join us in combating this odious crime: violence perpetrated against children.