



REGERINGSKANSLIET

Ministry of Health and Social Affairs  
Sweden



BARNE- OG FAMILIEDEPARTEMENTET

*Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs*

# **Report from the Meeting with High Officials on Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region**

**Stockholm  
30 - 31 October 2001**

Report by Prof. Stewart Asquith

## **1. Introduction and Welcome**

This meeting with High Officials on Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region was organised into two main sessions. The morning session was chaired by Sweden and the afternoon session by Norway.

In the introduction to the morning session, the Swedish Minister for Family and Social Affairs, Ingela Thalén, welcomed all to the meeting and emphasised that the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children was of course high on the political agenda in all countries in the region. Political Leaders in the Baltic Sea States had committed themselves to bilateral, multi lateral and regional cooperation in this as in other areas. Far from diminishing, the problems associated with commercial sexual exploitation are more extensive than they were 5 years ago and had in fact shown signs of growth within the context of globalisation. There was an opportunity for the region to make a contribution through the existing cooperation and the IT Network to the debates and discussions to be held at the 2nd World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, in Yokohama in December 2001. The existing cooperation on the IT Network had of course been successful and had also benefited from EU funding through the STOP- programme.

State Secretary Agneta Karlsson also welcomed Prof. Stewart Asquith the Rapporteur and the Russian interpreters. She also directed the meeting to the relevant papers folders and agenda and the important text<sup>1</sup> which was to form the basis of the discussion for the day.

## **2. Presentation of the IT - Network, The Child Centre.**

**Ingrid Åkerman, Head of Section and Helena Seyfert, Special Adviser** gave a presentation on the IT Network outlining the main phases in the development of the Child Centre. The main aim of the IT Co-operation was to improve knowledge in the field and to share and exchange both knowledge and expertise on the means necessary to combat and address the commercial sexual exploitation of children in the region. Following the 2nd World Congress in Stockholm and the Baltic Sea States Summit in Riga in 1998 the Swedish and Norwegian governments undertook to develop a model for cooperation between officials and professionals in this area. The result of the cooperation was the IT – Network, The Child Centre.

The main areas of focus of the work made possible through the technology and the cooperation include

- The prevention and protection of children at risk of commercial sexual exploitation;
- The rehabilitation of child victims
- The promotion of research
- The exchange of expertise
- The identification of good practice
- The provision of information

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<sup>1</sup> Attached as Annex 1 which is the revised version of the text which was laid before the meeting as "Annex 3- Text for decision by ministers for child matters".

Each country involved has appointed a National Co-ordinator who maintains national responsibility for participation in the Child Centre and is also responsible for gathering information and uploading it to the Child Centre. Each country also has a Competence Centre- an institution or voluntary organisation with the most appropriate skills and knowledge in the field.

One of the main issues which had to be addressed in the development of the Child Centre was that relating to security. It has from the outset been a prime consideration that the Child Centre can not itself be exposed for those who exploit the children and that the information contained in it should be as secure as possible. For this reason a highly sophisticated security system employing both hardware and passworded access has been developed. Similarly there are two main elements to the Child Centre- an open public and one restricted. In this way certain information is made available for all to access whereas only certain authorised persons have access to the closed section of the Child Centre. Through the use of an "editing tool" all information is uploaded only by authorised users though this does mean that the information provided comes from professionals and practitioners- making it highly relevant to their day to day work. The ability of key actors to upload and update information safely and securely is a significant feature of the Child Centre.

The official language of the Child Centre is English though each country has the opportunity to publish papers in its own language but must make available an English summary. In this way. The Child Centre is accessible to all in the region whilst respecting the importance of the hosting of information and knowledge in national languages.

All countries except Poland have the technology equipment needed installed; Germany is currently addressing fire wall issues; one of the competence centers in Estonia is connected; Russia is also working on firewall issues; and Lithuania has also embedded the Child Centre into their own web page. A statistical tool has also been installed to allow for monitoring of use and the Child Centre is hosted on a closed and transferable server system in Stockholm- an important consideration should the need to relocate the Centre ever arise. All indications from the recent meeting of the Competence Centres in Lubeck are that there is much enthusiasm for the Child Centre and the difficulties identified will be readily addressed and resolved. But there is no doubt that the Child Centre has already become a significant working tool in the region.

## **2. Future Co-operation**

**State Secretary Agneta Karlsson Sweden** directed the meeting to address the future of the Child Centre IT Co-operation. **Minister Ingela Thalén** pointed to the work of the Special Group on Children at Risk and the work done and confirmed that there is much more knowledge on the sexual exploitation of children but that there is still a need for greater cooperation on children's affairs between individuals and countries- especially within the EU framework. She also stated that the Network could of course contribute to work against sexual exploitation of children in other areas. This of course has from the outset been an important consideration for the Child Centre- the ability to meet identified needs within the region but also at the same to contribute to wider global issues.

The project has however now reached the conclusion of the first phase of its development and can be handed over to the CBSS<sup>2</sup>. A statement of priorities directing the future activities of the Child Centre would need to be given to the CBSS though it is acknowledged that these will inevitably change from time to time and the priorities could well change in any case once the project is within the CBSS framework. Regular ongoing assessment of the future direction on the IT Cooperation would be a necessity in order to ensure the meaningfulness of the work of the Child Centre in meeting the aims and objectives laid down for it.

In order for there to be a smooth and effective transition period in the hand over to the CBSS, **Agneta Karlsson** stated that Sweden would make staff available to the CBSS for the first 6 months. Sweden and Norway would also present the project at Yokohama as an example of Baltic Sea States cooperation, and it would be an excellent opportunity to be able to announce at Yokohama that a decision had been made to establish the project within the CBSS framework and that the future of this particular- and very important- regional cooperation had been secured.

**State Secretary Odd Anders With**, Norway spoke on behalf of the new Norwegian government and stated how pleased Norway was to co-host the meeting. Mr With had been at the original decision making meeting in Tallinn and had been particularly interested to follow the development of the IT cooperation. The Child Centre had contributed to higher awareness of sexual exploitation and had already become an effective tool. It also provided the opportunity to learn from each other and address common challenges.

The main challenge in Norway was to combat the sexual exploitation of children where estimates are that 5% of all children experience sexual abuse. Concern was expressed at the delays in offering child victims treatment and there were many discussions going on in Norway on the topic. The future challenge was to develop meaningful concrete actions. Main issues in Norway included-

- Increasing our knowledge
- Developing measures to assist exposed minors in municipalities
- Developing effective preventive measures
- Developing appropriate methods of working and treatment for children
- Identifying juveniles at risk

Such a programme in Norway is being viewed within the extended framework of the Children at Risk project and – as stated in the earlier priorities paper drawn up- children at risk will include all children at risk and not just those at risk of sexual exploitation. This could include for example, street children; abandoned children; juvenile delinquents; young drug addicts etc. That is, children at risk of sexual exploitation had to be seen in the context of measures and policies devised to meet the needs of all children at risk.

The earlier priorities paper had advocated just such a broader approach and future and present challenges in this area must involve the promotion of values safeguarding the dignity of children.

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<sup>2</sup> Council of the Baltic Sea States

**Agneta Karlsson** pointed out that in terms of locating the IT cooperation within the CBSS secretariat, the Working Group on Democratic Institutions had met in Reykjavik but had been unable to take a decision and that a written procedure had been agreed. In May, a text had been sent out to all countries in the region and positive replies had been received from some though others had asked questions which needed to be answered.

The time had now arrived, she suggested, where a decision had to be taken regarding the integration of the IT project within the framework of the CBSS secretariat. Some changes had been made to the text<sup>3</sup> and comments were sought from the representatives at the meeting.

**Poland** stated that because a new government had been elected it was not in a position to give a commitment. No suggestion was being made that Poland was against the proposal- simply that more time was needed because of the transition period it found itself in.

**Denmark** made a number of points in offering its support for the proposal-

1. Denmark of course agreed for the need to combat commercial sexual exploitation and stated its wish to promote working together in this field. It was important that a Working Group for Child Cooperation (WGCC) was established to get things moving.
2. The project must soon translate into direct benefits for children themselves and again the need for concrete action was emphasised.
3. Denmark was very satisfied with the new revised text – especially in that it promotes a broader perspective in working with children.
4. The Danish representatives were empowered to support the integration into the CBSS and also that Denmark can provide finance for the first year; Denmark would wish to participate in the Working Group for Child Cooperation and assist in the determination of future priorities.

The **Finnish** representative did not have a mandate to commit **Finland** at this stage but was sure that- as with Denmark- funding can be assured for the first year and also hoped that the direct benefit for children would be more clearly identified.

**Latvia** is ready to commit itself to contributing to the budget for next year (the decision has to be approved by Cabinet of Ministers) and the intention is for future commitment though no binding commitments could be made yet. The Latvian representative also suggested the importance of cooperation with others including those outwith the CBSS and that new actors could meaningfully be involved. Priority should however be given to concrete action to directly benefit children.

**Mr Jacek Starosciak** Director of the CBSS secretariat stated that the secretariat was prepared in practical terms to integrate the IT – network and the Child Centre and had already had experience in accommodating an energy unit and also a new unit of the Baltic 21 initiative and the experience from these two exercises would be extremely useful. Locating the Child Centre would not then be a difficult exercise and integrating the Child Centre would be a further concrete example of the cooperation and collaboration that already existed within the region. The decision to locate the IT project within the CBSS is a very important decision therefore further reflecting the cooperation and collaboration within and throughout the region.

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<sup>3</sup> Tabled as "Annex 3- Text for decision by ministers for child matters".

After thanking all for the work of the past two and half years, **Agneta Karlsson** summarised the key decisions made.

1. The decision had been accepted to integrate the Child Centre into the CBSS secretariat.
2. A Working Group for Child Co operation will be established within the framework of CBSS.
3. Sweden will bear the personnel cost of staff for the first six months of the transition to the CBSS secretariat.
4. There is complete agreement.

## **Afternoon Session**

**Odd Anders With** thanked Sweden for what it had done so far and asked **Ambassador Bo Henrikson** to summarise and clarify just what had been agreed today. He stated that

1. *A number of countries had accepted the modified text. These included-*

Denmark  
Finland ( with reservations)  
Iceland  
Latvia  
Lithuania  
Norway  
Germany  
Sweden

2. *Countries not yet able to commit fully-*

Estonia  
Poland  
Russia

He stated that it was important for the planning of future activities that answers be received as soon as possible and the deadline of November the 27<sup>th</sup>( as the WGDI meets on the 30<sup>th</sup> November) was set for replies. What had been decided at the meeting is now very concrete and there will be a Common Regional Identity on Child Issues.

In terms of future work, **Norway** argued for the importance of an information strategy to guide the common presentation and promotion of the project. It was also agreed that the Working Group for Child Co operation should meet as soon as possible and preferably in January. Norway and Sweden are to arrange the meeting and set an agenda for it. It was important to elect a chairman as soon as possible and that a priority paper be developed.

Island together with other participants stressed the importance of “continuity” in the project. **Bo Henrikson** repeated that the current staff working in the Special Group would work with the CBSS secretariat for the first six months and that they would work with the Working

Group in determining the future direction of the Child Centre and laying down a strategy for integration. He also suggested that it would be important to have another Ministerial meeting

at some stage in 2002. In terms of the “ continuity “ issue, **Jacek Starosciak** stated that future appointment of staff after the transitional period would be by normal open and transparent procedures.

It was agreed that Sweden and Norway would take the responsibility to call together the Working Group for Child Co operation to a meeting in January. There was general agreement that there should be as little delay as possible in taking forward the work.. The Working Group for Child Co-operation would at this meeting plan the direction of the future work and prepare a priority paper.

**Latvia** made a statement that more countries should be involved in the in preparation of this meeting. **Latvia** also volunteered to contribute to the preparation work.

A suggestion was also made that there may be a need for a smaller group in order to prepare the future discussions within WGCC with regard to the future work. **Bo Henrikson** suggested that this question should be left for the WGCC to decide but that all countries could of course transmit their views to Norway and Sweden (see above).

### 3. Yokohama

**Agneta Bjorklund** informed the group that 53 countries had officially stated their intention of being represented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress in Yokohama. There would be 2000 delegates of whom 1000 would represent NGOs; 750 from governments and the rest would be journalists, diplomats etc. An outcome document had already been prepared though it was agreed that it was rather general in nature.

The IT project would be presented at Yokohama on behalf of all those countries involved and also at the regional preparatory conference in Budapest. There was general agreement that the decision to integrate the Child Centre within the CBSS secretariat was a politically very important decision and that it afforded the opportunity for the countries in the region to exploit the opportunity presented by the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress to formally announce this excellent example of regional cooperation.

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All should note that it was also agreed that this report would be the basis for all countries to show their agreement with the decisions taken and the actions proposed. The assumption will be made that if after receipt of this report no comments are made that this may be taken as agreement with the decisions made and reported in it.

