

Ministry of Health and Social Affairs in Sweden
The Swedish Special Group for
Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region

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**Stockholm Ministerial Meeting on
Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region.
17th March 1999**

A follow up to the Tallinn Conference on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of
Children in the Baltic Sea Region.

**Report by Professor Stewart Asquith
University of Glasgow**

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BACKGROUND TO THE CONFERENCE

The fight against commercial sexual exploitation of children is a joint responsibility of all countries and because of its transborder nature, well developed international co-operation is important. For this reason the Baltic Sea States have decided within the Council of the Baltic Sea States to co-operate on the issue on different levels.

The first step in this co-operation was the Conference on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Tallinn on 3-4 September 1998. The Conference clearly demonstrated the great interest to confront the problems of commercial sexual exploitation of children. At the same time, the fact was highlighted that a whole range of activities within the society- not least in the social field- need to be confronted in order to create a good environment for children.

At the Tallinn conference, on behalf of the Swedish Government, Mrs. Maj-Inger Klingvall, the Minister for Social Security announced that in the follow up to the Conference Sweden would pay special attention to social issues. In October 1998, in accordance with her statement she decided to extend her mandate for continued work in this area to overall questions regarding *children at risk*; mainly referring to neglected children, abused children, sexually exploited children.

At this first meeting on children at risk the Minister finds it important that those who are responsible for children in this region, get the opportunity to meet for a broad discussion on priorities and methods for different kinds of co-operation with special focus on prevention, protection and rehabilitation. The ambition of the meeting is that the importance of children's rights are stressed, areas of special importance for future co-operation are identified and ways of achieving such co-operation are agreed upon. And to create a good basis for our discussions, participating ministers were asked to make a ten minutes statement on ideas and measures for further co-operation aiming at placing the question of those vulnerable children high on the political agenda of the region.

The Conference¹

Opening Speech by Mrs. Maj Inger Klingvall, Minister for Social Security and Children, Sweden

The Minister began her speech with a quotation from 9 year old Charlotte-

“ If we don't have a good childhood, we destroy the future. All Children have a right to a childhood. If we don't get one it can destroy our future. We are glad to receive love. We want grown-ups to treat us right, and we want to enjoy being

¹ The conference was chaired by Hans Svensson, State Secretary, Ministry for Health and Social Affairs, Sweden.

with them. We want to feel safe with them close at hand. Even when we are grown up it feels good if older people around us like us.”

Charlotte’s word provided the background for the meeting in that children are our common future and that in the world at large many children do not receive those things asked for by Charlotte. On the contrary, rapid social and economic change impact most on the weak and vulnerable- particularly children. Two cases of sexual abuse in Sweden had caused intense debate about just how they could have happened and about how to talk with children and to teach them that they have a right to express their views and that they have a right to say no. The fact such cases happened in Sweden was a reminder that such issues are common to us all.

All Baltic Sea States have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the four key principles- non discrimination, best interests, the right to life and development and the right to be heard- are based on the full and equal value of children as human beings. The Baltic Sea Co-operation had focused on children who have been sexually exploited and after the World congress, Sweden had proposed follow-up work with these children.

The first real step in this work was the Tallinn conference and for the first time parliamentarians, government representatives, experts and NGOs met to discuss the importance of legislation, education and co-operation in the fight against commercial sexual exploitation of children. The conference stressed the importance of multidisciplinary Cupertino in legislation, police work and social services and the importance of working with children in a broader sense. All countries have to develop preventive, protective and rehabilitative services for children.

Significant in changing how we deal with children who are abused are co-operation between organisations, professions and local and national authorities. Co-operation is also needed at regional and international levels and in particular in reference to the sharing of expertise and knowledge.

Emphasising the importance of sharing knowledge, Minister Klingvall outlined the ways in which Sweden had sought to establish co-ordination in information- that is passing on knowledge about prevention, protection and rehabilitation of abused children in the region.

These include:

- the setting up of the Swedish Special Group for Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region;
- a survey of different co-operative projects in the region, particularly focused on the fact that almost every municipality in Sweden has a twin town in the Baltic Region;
- the publication of the newspaper *Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region*.

Further, the CBSS Ombudsman for Human Rights and Democracy argued at Tallinn that each country should appoint an authority or organisation to be responsible for co-ordinating the internal part of the regional work. A network using modern

communications technology to hold consultations, training and guidance was of particular significance.

Minister Klingvall argued for a structure which would allow communication across a network of relationships and which would provide access to a database on information on all regional activities relating to children. Accordingly, Sweden proposed:

- that all players in the area link up to a special part of the internet- a virtual meeting place for children's issues in the region which would provide a forum for dialogue, a database with basic documentation, channels for expert consultation etc.
- the site could be used in contacts between authorities and organisations in the different countries and in international contacts.

Such an arrangement was presented later in the conference but Minister Klingvall made it clear that Sweden is prepared to fund the establishment of such a system and to arrange a meeting between national experts to decide upon form and content.

Mr. Jacek Starosciak, Director of the CBSS secretariat

At the annual conference of Foreign Ministers , the supreme decision making body of the Confederation of Baltic Sea States, in June 1998, the Chairmanship passed to Lithuania. At the same meeting, a number of important decisions were taken one of which related to the attendance of the Director of the CBSS secretariat at the meeting. This was the formal agreement CBSS in Stockholm. The mandate of the secretariat includes:

- providing technical and organisational support to the Chairman of the CBSS and the working bodies and structures of the Council.
- ensuring smooth continuity and contributing to enhanced co-ordination of CBSS activities.
- carrying out the Information/public Relations strategy of the CBSS.
- maintaining contacts with other organisations operating in and around the Baltic Sea Region, national authorities of members states and the media community.

As the Mr Starosciak had attended the Tallinn conference he also noted that in this field there is a need for multilateral and multidisciplinary co-operation in legislation, police work and social services. This could be achieved through such tools as:

- the Commissioner on Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.
- Working Group on Assistance to Democratic Institutions
- Impending Committee of Senior Officials in Iceland

- Task force of Special Representatives of CBSS Heads of Government in Combating Organised Crime.

Emphasising the fact that most abuse takes place in towns and in the regions, he underlined Mr Starosciak underlined the importance of relations between the CBSS secretariat and the regional and municipal authorities in the Baltic sea region.

Statements by Ministers

Mrs. Irena Degutiene, Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Lithuania

In agreement with Mrs Klingvall, the Minister emphasised the importance of recognising that the safety of the child within the family and society is a guarantee of the future of society. She also reminded the meeting that 1999 was the tenth anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Minister outlined two aspects:

- (a) social policy targeted at children at risk
- (b) the possibilities for international co-operation in the field of commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Emphasising the broader context referred to by Mrs Klingvall, the Minister identified one of the main goals in the field of child right protection to provide social support that could preserve all interests and rights of *every* child.

In Lithuania children at risk include in particular neglected and abused children and so called street children- the main source being disfunctioning families. For that reason, since children's problems are closely tied up with family issues, Lithuania has adopted the concept of Family Policy. Similarly, the Law on Children Guardianship not only stipulates the role and obligations of foster parents but also consolidate financial support for the fostered child.

Commercial sexual exploitation has no borders and is not the problem of just one country- it is clearly an international problem as identified at the World Congress. Within Lithuania, the pursuit of the international obligation derived from the Agenda for Action, includes:

- improvement of the legal system
- professional training of specialists involved
- education
- rehabilitation and reintegration system for victims of sexual abuse.

Further special attention has been placed on international co-operation- especially with the police.

The Minister concluded by stressing two main issues.

First, the importance of all Baltic Sea States preparing national programmes against children's commercial and sexual exploitation and thereby the possibility of working out a common Baltic Sea Region policy. Second, the need for a permanent Working Group of Specialists collecting information, proposals, developing new ideas etc. in trying to eradicate commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Lithuania would appreciate international support in the sphere of professional training of specialists involved in the field as well as consultations of experts to develop proper rehabilitative programmes.

Ms. Elzbieta Osewska, Head of Department of Family Affairs, Poland

No state, said Ms Osewska, would not consider the welfare of a child as a value of particular concern; no politician would not include the well being of a child amongst their important tasks; and parents, doctors, judges and official would state that they are always guided by the welfare of the child.

Nevertheless, the reality for children is often different and the sexual exploitation of children constitutes a serious violation of human rights.

In order to deal with commercial sexual exploitation there needs to be:

- an understanding of the causes of sexual exploitation of children.
- an assessment of the scale of the phenomenon
- a uniform system of counteracting commercial sexual exploitation
- a system of assistance to the abused victims.

It is only through a sound family experience that children can have proper physical and psychological development and a child's rights are endangered when the rights of the family are threatened in all senses. It is when families are in a difficult material position that children are at particular risk and ways have to be found by governments, local governments and non governmental agencies to support families. The state should have a pro- family policy.

In terms of the pathology of such issues as commercial sexual exploitation, the role the media plays should not be omitted as the negative cultures and models displayed by the media do have an influence on beliefs and attitudes. For this reason control has to be exercised over the media which should be used more to promote proper ethical attitudes in society. Particular attention has to be given to the role played by the police, courts, public institutions and NGOs in developing an effective strategy against the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

It has to be appreciated that though the development of preventive measures are costly, they are not so costly as seeking to eliminate the effects of commercial sexual exploitation. It will never be completely prevented and that is why ways have to be found of organising professional assistance for victims and families.

The “ family” requires protection as a unit in its own right and the rights of the family are not a simple sum of the rights of the individuals within it. The protection of individual composition parts of the family guaranteed by international law seems not to be sufficient any longer. The Human Rights Commission should also undertake the promotion and protection of family rights within the international system of human rights. Poland considers it proper to work out an international document on the protection of family rights.

Mrs. Inete Ielete, Director of the Children Rights Protection Centre, Latvia

Before Mrs Ielete spoke, a video was shown, made by Latvian television, of a programme designed to meet the needs of street children in Riga.

In common with other speakers, Mrs Ielete emphasised the importance of seeing children as the future of society and of protecting children. The Latvian government had made significant developments in legislation and in preventive and rehabilitative programmes.

Local governments had addressed the violation of children rights and several state programmes had been created such as juvenile crime prevention programmes. The most important problem was in the rehabilitation of children who had been abused.

In terms of future co-operation, Mrs Ielete suggested that there was a great need for co-operation in:

- the field of research and the creation of an information database.
- training and assistance for children at risk.
- raising public awareness.
- developing an ethical code to protect children and encourage the media to play an active role.

Children’s rights, it has to be remembered, are human rights

Mr. Odd Anders With, State Secretary in Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, Norway

The State Secretary agreed with Mrs Klingvall’s position that the commercial sexual exploitation of children had to be seen within the extended context of children at risk. Though there are certain issues are specific, we do know that there are much wider social and individual factors which put children at risk in general. It is for this reason that an open and broad policy approach is useful. Nevertheless, there is also a need to develop further and exchange experiences about more targeted measures.

He then gave updated information on a number of Norwegian measures outlined at the Tallinn conference.

A network and resource group had been established to strengthen and better co-ordinate measures against all forms of sexual exploitation of children. Norway will of course also be following up the conference in Tallinn by arranging seminars on police and judicial matters whereas Sweden will be arranging those on more social issues. What the specific topics for such seminars is of course subject to the preferences of the countries involved.

But the Norwegian plan to follow up the World Congress against commercial sexual exploitation, based on the main points of the Agenda for Action, include:

- the recent enactment in the Education Act (applying to primary and secondary schools) requiring the provision by personnel of a good conduct certificate- not having been convicted of child sexual abuse or under investigation of such.
- the development by two ministries of advisory guidelines on how to handle suspicions of child sexual abuse committed by employees.
- stressing the importance of the need for a broad debate on values and ethics as a contribution to awareness raising.

Any work for the benefit of children at risk requires national. Regional and international networks- including public authorities, expert practitioners, people involved in research and NGOs. The main challenge for politicians at the national level is to promote action for exploited and vulnerable children and this has to be done between ministries in charge of specific policy areas. Further there is a need for spokespersons for vulnerable children and also for greater alliances across a range of organisations.

In closing the State Secretary emphasised the importance of exchanging experiences and there are two clear questions to be addressed-

- (a) What can we do to prevent children at risk from becoming children in crises?
- (b) What can we do to help children in crises to live dignified lives in the future?

Mr. Konstantin Laikam, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Labour and Social Development, Russia

The Deputy Minister addressed the theme of a number of speakers of the need to see commercial sexual exploitation of children in the broader context of children at risk by reminding the conference of the effect of deteriorating² social situation in Russia on children. The social and economic situation has brought new risks such as neglect, drugs, alcohol abuse, criminal delinquency and commercial sexual exploitation.

² The impact on deteriorating social and economic conditions on the lives of children was a theme addressed during the media conference held during the conference.

There is no doubt in his mind that the commercial sexual exploitation of children is a most destructive and damaging experience for children. Every year up to 10% of all children in institutions have sexual transmitted diseases or have been sexually abused and that there have been prosecutions for sexual abuse against children as young as under 14.

Nevertheless, despite efforts to do so, there is no real estimate of the scale of the phenomenon or of the nature of it. One suggestion for future co-operation put forward by the Deputy Minister was precisely in this area- the need for the development of methods to quantify the problem.

In terms of the causes, the commercial sexual exploitation of children is clearly linked to poverty which leads to a deteriorating of family climate and negative patterns of behaviour. Though resources were short, everything that could be was being done to help children at risk. A new network of institutions was being established.

Active co-operation was needed he urged by all countries:

- to develop adequate forms of assistance for children at risk
- to develop training- especially of social workers.

New legislation had been introduced to promote children's right to receive services and shelter and against child neglect and juvenile delinquency and for the control of pornographic products.

In terms of current activity, there was a need for exchanges of experience and best practices. A new target programme specifically concerned with Juvenile Delinquency had been recently agreed upon. In this as in all fields relating to children at risk, Russia has a lot to learn from its neighbours.

Mr. Bragi Gudbrandsson, Director of Government Agency for Child Protection

Mr Gudbrandsson noted that Iceland, though it has been able to share experiences with members of the Nordic Community and Scandinavian countries, had sought guidance on services for sexually abused children from a different source.

After the World Congress in Stockholm, an important change took place in Iceland in the perception of the sexual exploitation of children. For a long time Iceland had been in denial or minimisation of the problem and had then moved to a second stage characterised by the attribution of sexual exploitation and the abuse of children to a few deviants- offenders with extremely pathological types of behaviour. After the Congress, a new perspective developed - that the sexual abuse of children must be viewed as a complex social problem with international connotations and requires systematic intervention through law, government and NGOs.

A study in Iceland in 1996 revealed that during a four year period, an average of 112 cases annually were reported - indicating that between 2 and 3% of all children under 14 are dealt with as potential victims of sexual abuse. Since we also know that official figures are also estimates, the findings shocked many. Moreover, less than two thirds of the cases were referred to authorities.

In response, the Government established the Children's House- based on the American Child Advocacy Centre. The Children's House is premised on a partnership between the agencies of child protection services, the health services, law enforcement and prosecution- committed to working together under one roof to investigate sexual abuse; provide assessment and the necessary treatment for the victims and their families. The mission is to prevent the re-victimisation of the child by providing a child friendly milieu for investigation and empowering the child to overcome the traumatic consequences.

The programme offered has three main components-

- (a) investigation- involving interviews of the child on videotape and specialised interviewer. The tape is then available for all agencies involved and preserves the child's account for courts.
- (b) medical examination - on site medical facilities are available with the examination recorded also on video.
- (c) treatment- therapeutic assessment is undertaken and a professional team of practitioners available on site.

The existence of the Children's House, quite apart from its own merits, has transformed the nature of multidisciplinary and multi-agency co-operation and the model could be of special value in the CBSS.

Mr Gudbrandsson went on to suggest:

- the possibility of establishing a working group on Children at risk comparable to the Nordic-Baltic Working Group on Gender Equality.

The need to consider whether a number of bodies with an interest in child protection operating in the region could be encouraged to extend their activities with the participation of the Baltic Sea States.

Mr. Wolfgang Linckelmann, Deputy Director General for International Affairs, Federal Republic of Germany

Mr Linckelmann acknowledged the growing importance of co-operation in the Baltic Sea States and in particular on the topic of commercial sexual exploitation of children because of which children suffer great psychological and physical trauma. Children depend on the State to protect them and they have a right to be protected.

Following the Stockholm World Congress Germany is committed to ensuring that the commercial sexual exploitation of children is outlawed world wide and all the social forces in Germany are working in co-operation to that end.

What is needed, he argued, are long term strategies which are not devised for short term immediate political or budgetary reasons. Further work in this field has to be transparent, thereby making us all accountable to each other in our efforts. The sharing of information is an important measure and the example of the experience in the Baltic states is an excellent one.

Germany has addressed the appropriate legal prerequisites and has accordingly:

- Stiffened the penalties for child abuse.
- Widened the range of therapeutic options for perpetrators and developed further security measures for recidivists.
- Introduced the use of audio visual aids for children in courts.
- Introduced Witness advocates (paid for by the State) for children in abuse cases.

In addition, local centres operating with socio-educational aims are being supported and national child lines are receiving assistance.

In terms of prevention, it is important that:

- Global awareness of the issue be raised.
- Child abuse be outlawed altogether.
- Political and expert lead initiatives depend on public awareness and acceptance of the issue.

There is little point, he argued, in developing political and expert measures if the population will not support their implementation. In many respects, what we are having to do is redefine the nature of our relationship with our children altogether. An element of this is that ways have to be found through which children and young people can participate in developing appropriate measures and of protecting their rights. We should be creating an environment makes our children self confident and strong.

The internet is clearly an important medium and subject to abuse in many ways which put our children at risk of exploitation and abuse. In the interest of children, there is a need for an international convention on computer data and network crime which would be globally binding. The police in Germany have already established a unit to screen areas of the internet – a useful mechanism which does not need to wait until notification of an offence committed.

What prosecution of offenders through international co-operation in the information and intelligence field has shown is the effectiveness of joint initiatives.

Mr Linckelmann stressed two points in conclusion.

One was that account should be taken of the discussions in all the different for a and groups concerned with commercial sexual exploitation. The other is that the idea of a clearing house as proposed by Mrs Klingvall was very interesting. However in terms of priority it was perhaps more important to exchange information on best practices and legal policies.

Mr. Hannes Danilov, Chancellor, Ministry of Social Affairs, Estonia

Because of extreme poverty and unemployment of their parents, many children in Estonia were unwanted; were in families with marital problems and had not attended school.

There has been a rapid growth of drug use which had put alcohol abuse into the background. The official reports do not suggest that sexual offences have increased though the surveys which have been done indicate that there is serious underreporting with only 20-30% of all victims of abuse reporting their experience.

In Tartu a centre established to help children and families who were the victims of violence had been used by a large number of people again evidence of the violence directed at children and families.

Estonia had ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and in 1995 various pieces of Welfare Legislation were harmonised in response to the requirements to deal with commercial sexual exploitation. A major problem identified by Mr. Danilov was not the lack of appropriate legislation but the failure to implement the legislation which already existed.

Mr Danilov acknowledged that Estonia had a lot to learn particularly in structuring working relationships between officials and the many volunteers involved in assisting children. NGOs and international organisations were playing an increasingly important role in combating sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation of children. The proposal made by Estonia was that there should be developed a child oriented culture with leisure camps and other facilities for *all* children. Children should also be supported to seek their rights.

Mrs. Vappu Taipale, Director General, National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, STAKES, Finland

Mrs Taipale outlined a new legal provision in Finland in which:

- sexual acts with those under 16 were punishable though not in the case of mutual relations between minors.

- the protective upper age limit is 18 for abuse within families.
- the purchase of sexual services from those under 18 is punishable.
- the principle of double liability was addressed though there were a number of notable exceptions.

Moreover a new national Working Group had been established in 1999 to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children and the first focus of the group was to be child sex tourism.

As an indication of how children had become involved, one of the Voluntary Working days in Finland had been devoted by children to this area and money raised by the voluntary activities of children had been sent to ECPAT to support projects dealing with Child Prostitution in Thailand. Such a project meant that children were aware of the issues and an opportunity had been afforded for discussion with children about child prostitution.

Under the auspices of the Stop programme a project had been established between Russia, Estonia, Germany, Sweden and Finland to monitor trends and developments in prostitution and trafficking. Similarly a project on child custody and aftercare had involved children and parents in recognition of three principles- participation, listening and empowerment.

In common with other countries and general findings research undertaken on commercial sexual exploitation in the 1980s had recently been updated and confirmed the view that there was considerable gap between the rate of suspected and actual verified cases of abuse. Changes may therefore be required in the performance of professionals and the system in dealing with such cases.

Mrs. Taipale also outlined an electronic information medium through which information was distributed to those in a medical network and in which commercial sexual exploitation was one of the main topics. She also emphasised the importance of the work of the Finnish UNICEF Committee in a joint project with Russia in Kaliningrad aimed at protecting children from drug abuse and drug related dangers. She also asked that consideration be given to the value of the Arctic Agenda 21 and the conference to be held in Canada on Children's Health. Though Ministers for the Environment will be there, Ministers for Health and Social Affairs will not- she asked that these be informed of the Canadian conference.

In conclusion, Mrs Taipale welcomed all the proposals made at the conference and suggested two others. One is that Balts be used around the region to distribute information to tourists on commercial sexual exploitation. The other is that there should be further co-operation in research and in the dissemination of information about best practices.

Mr. Brian Nicholls, Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Social Affairs, Denmark

We are not here, stated the Deputy State Secretary, to speak about what we are doing in our country. Rather we are here to speak about how co-operate and take things forward through some form of common action. Nor is the framework of the meeting about setting up new structures or new internal organisations. We are here to address the common problem that there are too many children at risk.

The fact is he argued, that:

- we are not working well together.
- that we could be working together better.
- that we are not sure of each other's priorities.
- that we may say one thing but think another.

In the region there are many for a, many different interests to take into account and many different values, ethics and cultures to be considered.

Mr Nicholls' concern was more with (a) Processes and (b) Actions.

In reference to Processes he argued that Nordic Countries are perhaps too quick to propose actions which suit their own interests but are not appropriate for the other countries in the Baltic region; that the commercial sexual exploitation of children is a pressing topic but has to be seen as one amongst many pressing topics in the region; and that there are many initiatives already taking place with good results- it is not the case that we are starting from scratch. There is already considerable dialogue between Denmark and each country and there could perhaps be more formalised agreements and joint commitments for action on both sides.

As for Actions, all countries already have their own dialogues, and programmes and co-operation. Denmark for example, has a 7 million (US) dollar programme where children at risk are a high priority and also organises seminars at a local level in the field. So it is not the case that nothing is being done but that there is a need for co-ordination of what is already being done.

Two specific suggestions were made in conclusion.

One was that hat consideration be given to the various soft measures identified as important at the Tallinn conference. These include exchanging information, further dialogue, creation of databases etc.. The other was that the local conferences, such as the recent one in Riga, should be followed up.

The main conclusion drawn was that an important first step would be to exchange views on the varying values in the region and to decide on our national priorities.

Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation of Children at Risk

Mr. Carl Svedin³, Associate Professor, MD in Psychiatry, Sweden

Identification as a Necessary Step for Prevention

In his presentations, Mr. Svedin focused on children at risk and prevention and on treatment and rehabilitation of victims. We have a responsibility to prevent abuse of our children in the first place but if they are the victims of abuse we have a duty to perform investigate and offer help in such a way that children and families can benefit without getting into more distress.

Information, policy making and change of attitude are crucial and primary steps in influencing how we deal with abuse.

Sexual Abuse

Though figures are not accurately known, prevalence studies show that approximately 10-20% of all women and 3-10% of all men in Europe have experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18. Even though the figures in Sweden may be lower the impact nevertheless on the health of the nation is not insignificant.

Defining the phenomenon is equally difficult though a child sexual crime could be defined as “ a situation where an individual with a paedophilic disposition approaches an attractive child and if it results in a sexual abuse or not depends on the situation and the child’s ability to defend itself.”

Moreover, exploitation of a child often involves very careful selection of the child and “ courting” of the child through bribes, affection, and threats. Some children are more vulnerable in that they are less able to ward off an offence or an abuser due to a number of *risk factors* which might include low self esteem, low self confidence, social isolation, different kinds of disabilities such as psychological disabilities, mental retardation and physical handicap. Sexually exploited children are also found to come from underprivileged homes lacking in care and may well form the core of those children in different countries that become street children.

It is important to identify different forms of abuse experienced by children and to note that much abuse is perpetrated not by strangers but those known to children including their families and carers.

³ Mr Svedin had two presentations prepared for the conference. Time permitted only the making of one of them but the other has been included in the conference report because of it’s significance to the topic.

Physical Abuse

Many studies have shown that parents who have themselves as children experienced neglect and physical abuse are more prone to neglect, physically punish or abuse their children. Where parents lack support to complement their own parental abilities children may be further at risk.

Child Neglect and Psychological Abuse

Though difficult to define, a common trait of neglect is that the child has seriously or for a long time been exposed to physical as well as psychological neglect in care and protection.

Physical neglect is the most obvious form and involves the child not being properly protected from dangerous situations and does not have its basic needs met. *Emotional neglect* is more difficult to define and involves very subtle processes with the most extreme form evidenced in "non-organic failure to thrive children." *Medical neglect* clearly refers to the failure to meet the medical needs of children and *Mental Health neglect* refers to the failure to address the psychiatric or psychological needs of children.

Psychological/emotional abuse is when a more active pattern of behaviour towards or against a child is observed.

In seeking to meet the needs of children who have experienced such abuse and to support the families in which they find themselves, there is a need for professionals with education and training in identifying children at risk and a need for adequate resources to give such children protection, treatment and rehabilitation.

The Need for Treatment and Rehabilitation

Sexual Abuse

Mr. Svedin addressed the question of whether children take harm from abuse? The literature reveals that almost two thirds of all sexually abused children show psychological or behavioural disturbance and that there is no single symptoms common to all. Amongst the effects are post traumatic stress disorder, behaviour problems, sexualised behaviours and poor self esteem. In terms of the lasting effects, there is a clear overrepresentation of mental illness among the adult psychiatric population in diagnoses such as depression and self destructive behaviour including suicide attempts, eating disorders, substance abuse, psychoses, promiscuity and post traumatic stress disorder.

What is also clear from Mr. Svedin's presentation is that the nature and intensity of the abuse will affect the ability and resilience of the child to cope with it.

Traumatised children require professional treatment and there are both long term and short term issues to deal with. In the short term is the treatment of medical injuries or taking of specimens during the crisis intervention phase. Longer term issues relate more likely to trauma oriented psychotherapy and general psychotherapy. What is being attempted is to allow the child to find mechanisms to deal with the experiences; to provide a means for the child of developing self esteem and to recognising normal sexual experiences.

Physical Abuse

Apart from the clear physical consequences, other signs include anxiety and sleeping disturbances. After repeated abuse though, physical impairment may develop as may delayed mental development, impaired speech development and "softer" neurological signs. Low self esteem is also common as are usual psychiatric symptoms but most of all aggressive behaviour later during childhood.

In terms of treatment every treatment has to start with a risk assessment of the situation and of the parent's abilities to care for the child and treatment has to be co-ordinated between social service, school and child and adolescent psychiatry. There has to be a complement between the needs of the child and the parental style of parenting.

To perform assessments and treatment, personnel have to have sound knowledge and skill and training in co-operation skills. For the police, the most important skill is how to perform a professional interview with the child victim. For the social worker it is how to perform a detailed risk assessment of the child. For the psychotherapists it is knowledge in crisis intervention and a number of therapeutic techniques.

What is clearly needed then is a number of different professionals with both basic and further education and training and for multi-professional teams to be in place.

Ms. Cecilia Kjellgren, Senior Social Worker, Sweden

Child Abuse and Neglect- The Need for Child Protection

Ms Kjellgren shared with the meeting her experience working as a social worker in child protection in the city of Kristianstad for more than 20 years and her involvement in a twinning project for professionals in Siauliai in Lithuania.

Child protection services need well trained social workers who will work in co-operation with parents and key individuals around the child. She also emphasised the related importance of working closely with medical services, treatment facilities and crime investigators.

Reporting of child abuse in Sweden is mandatory and not just when the abuse takes place in the family but also in other situations. In this way children at risk are seen not

to be simply a private but as a public issue. Child protection cases involve maltreatment, neglect, emotional abuse, physical or sexual abuse (See Mr. Svedin's typology).

Clearly many people have to be interviewed in such cases but an important element in the work is interviewing children and social workers have a special responsibility to focus on the child. Indeed this is built into the Swedish Social Services Act. What this implies of course is the importance of professionals having the appropriate training to allow them to listen to the child.

But though the focus is on the individual child it has to be remembered that siblings are important too- both in terms of their knowledge of abuse but also too of their possible involvement. And further, the dynamics of family life are very complicated such that even the abused child may be very close to his/her parents and that the pathology of abuse may not surface in family dynamics all at the same time. Even when the offender is from outwith the family there may still be a need for the social worker to offer support to the family. But children do on occasion have to be cared for outside of the family.

Children who have been abused are still at risk, are vulnerable and it takes time to recover from abusive experiences.

Children who have been abused can reveal:

- lack of boundaries and no capacity to protect themselves.
- Sexualised behaviour and attract potential offenders.

Unfortunately it is the case that many sex offenders are trained to and do work with children. There are clear implications here for the need for a sensitive recruitment process.

Ms Kjellgren ended by referring to those adolescent abusers and the fact that sexual offending may begin at a very early age- in US literature 53.6% reported at least one offending act before the age of 18; in UK literature, 32% of offenders cautioned were under 21. The fact that offending begins at such an early age and is so prevalent is surely a concern for us all.

In the project in which she is involved Ms Kjellgren noted that:

- the onset of offending behaviour is on average at 14.1 years old;
- the average age of victims is 9.6 years old;
- in 91% of cases the victims are relatives or a boy/girl the offender knows;
- 17% are children in care;
- in 46% of cases the abusive acts are fondling or frottage;

- in 38% the abuse involves penetration;
- for many of the adolescent abusers emotional neglect and abuse are present in their childhood experiences;
- one third had been sexually abused and one third physically abused.

Work with adolescent offenders is clearly of importance as a mean to protect children from abuse and to inhibit the growth of offending behaviours in young people. Protection and prevention are important for the child protection services

Ms. Ann-Christin Cederborg , University Professor, Sweden

Police Interviews with Children

Ms. Cederborg outlined conclusions she drew from two studies.

In one she addressed the complex question of how to interview children at risk, her presentation based on police interviews with children. Her main aims were:

- to consider how the different narratives- those of the police and the child- are described;
- how they are seen to be credible in court;
- how the children react;
- the significance of the family background and relationships.

The data used were drawn directly from police interviews.

Since there has to be credible evidence of abuse a significant factor in determining “what happened” is what perception the judge has of children’s accounts. The significance of this is that in Swedish courts when there is a doubtful case the policy is to give the benefit of the doubt to the perpetrator.

Given that there are different opinions about what happened, key issues in the field of sexual abuse are how children’s narratives about what happened and interpreted and what is it that makes a child a credible witness in court. Using the example of “Ingrid” Ms Cederborg illustrated the way in which judges use theories about children’s psychological intentions to give accurate detailed information. Further, what is at stake is not simply what children may say but also how they behave in court.

In the other study, the topic was specifically about children’s narratives about sexual abuse and children’s secrets and the main purpose was to increase our understanding of how children and police officers “co-operate” when they construct meaning of the sexual abuse in interviews. The importance of her analysis of pre school children is that it was from the perspective of the child and highlighted the way in which adult oriented questions inhibited children from telling about their abuse. Thus, the very

system which was seen to be there to protect children may well have the effect of preventing children from telling *their* story in the first place. That is the language and culture of the adult context does not allow children to “tell” what happened to them. In some respects the way the questions are posed - since they are not from the perspective of the child, they can be said to deny the child the opportunity to make their voice heard in the legal context. The police do not take into account ways in which children express “detailed, concrete and coherent narratives about sensitive private or emotional matters.”

Far from being the child’s story it is the police in interview who may often construct what happened since it is their perspective- not that of the child which predominates. What this all serves to emphasise is the importance of children’s narratives and the notion what constitutes a “competent” witness when it is a young child that is involved. Given that it is very often only the child’s evidence against that of the perpetrator which is available for scrutiny by the court there is clear concern here about the need for an approach to interviewing which allows children to tell their stories in a way which can be accommodated by the legal and criminal justice system. What is required is a set of criminal procedures which that can maximise the accuracy in interviews to form the best possible basis for the court’s evidence. There is also a need to address the training afforded to key personnel such as the police in how best to interview young children.

General Conference Discussion

Four broad themes were addressed during the general floor discussion.

First, there was some support for the Danish suggestion that there should be further work done on identifying the values, ethics and culture of the countries involved in the region. This was with a view to being aware of just what were the priorities in each country and how they might be brought together in a common goal or within, as the Lithuanian delegate put it, a common or one language. Similarly, the suggestion by Denmark that there be “bilateral” arrangements also received some support. As the Chairman suggested however, the existence of bilateral arrangements did not of course preclude the possibility of a network as proposed at the beginning of the conference. Indeed they could complement each other.

Second, there was agreement that whereas a network deploying modern communications and information technologies could be very important, there nevertheless required to be further discussion about the nature of such a network and what technical issues needed further discussion by experts – both in the region and within the respective countries. As Mrs Taipale put it, there need to be a “next generation plan to discuss it.” Mrs Klingvall proposed that the Swedish government would establish a group of experts to take forward the discussions and that this be done relatively quickly.

The third broad theme could be referred to as “the child as informant”. Mrs Taipale referred to the often varying views on what was happening to children and how the child’s own view was at variance with those of significant adults such as parents,

teachers etc. It is clearly important that we listen to children but the issue was raised as to how to interpret different perspectives on children's experiences, how best to listen to children themselves; and what value to place on what they say. The issue was addressed by the three experts. Mr. Svedin suggested that there may be less variance in views when what is at issue is some physical ailment such as enuresis- there is little disagreement between child and adults here. However, when it is a question of more internal experiences and states- such as anxiety for example then there is likely to be considerable divergence amongst all parties concerned. In many respects, the status of the child is "constructed" from all the different views put forward by the significant adults.

Ms Cederborg identified just how important it was that those who interview children have the experience, education and knowledge about how best to do so and as her own presentation illustrated, in agreement with Mrs Taipale, the very structures and organisation of our institutions may well inhibit the child from telling his/her own story. There was also an important decision to be made as to who is the best person to speak to a child and how best to investigate their cases generally. Ms Kjellgren noted that twenty years or so ago very little attention was paid to children's views but now its importance was reflected by the fact that it was written into Swedish child welfare law.

The last point made was Mr Gudbrandsson who stated his view, expressed by others at different points during the meeting, that the use of the internet was extremely important for the work in Iceland – both as reference resource and as an aid to developing the Children's House.

Teleconferencing Demonstration by Telemedica

A teleconferencing demonstration was held of a discussion between Prof. Schilkin in Moscow and Mr. Svedin at the conference. The system on show had been developed by Telemedica in the medical field and was used in a number of medical contexts where high quality data transfer facilities were required.

What the demonstration illustrated clearly was the capacity of current information technologies, deploying relatively inexpensive computer hardware and software, for communication and consultation around the different countries in the region.

Prof Schilkin pointed out that the system was used across 10 regions in Russia and consisted of consultation points at a number of paediatric hospitals. More than two hundred consultations had been held in relation to children suffering from diseases. The merit of the system he argued is that consultations can be held inexpensively; irrespective of weather constraints; when the patient can't move; etc.

What was emphasised in the demonstration and during the subsequent discussion were the following-

- the cost benefit value of such a system in facilitating at-distance discussion and consultations with experts;

- the relatively low costs in establishing a teleconferencing system;
- the widening of access to information, skills and expertise through the medium of teleconferencing;
- the widening of access to current and projected databases on children and child related issues appropriate to the field of commercial sexual exploitation through use of the internet and web facilities;
- the ease with which the resources on display could be accommodated within current web sites such as the Baltinfo web site;
- the way in which information held in one country could be accessed readily by others- obviating the need to start from scratch in the development of literature and databases;
- the way in which the use of modern information technologies could enhance the promotion of a network in the region;
- the guarantee that such systems could operate with sophisticated levels and layers of security;
- the way in which the use of modern communications technologies could provide a basis for true collaboration and co-ordination.

A number of questions were asked about the system as demonstrated. In particular, the differential costing of communication services around the region was seen to be a potential difficulty. The relative cheapness of the hardware and software coupled with the fact that use of the web was as yet relatively cheap suggested that this might not be a problem.

The issue of who would /could input information into the system was also addressed and again this was seen to be a standard internet process with different layers of access allowing authorised individuals to input data or in some cases even having an "open" input system. Related was the identified need for a co-ordination agency to select and apply common criteria and common terms for use within the information system.

Though these questions were put, they were put more by the way of constructive inquiry rather than rejection of the system and it was clear that there was general acceptance (though Germany later was to question the relative priority that should be attached to it) of the role such a system had to play in the future in developing collaboration and co-ordination of the a network on commercial sexual exploitation in the Baltic Region.

A number of countries alluded at different points in the conference to their appreciation of the proposal as put by Mrs Maj Inger Klingvall and to the potential value of the use of teleconferencing and of information exchange through and across the internet. This was seen to be a positive aspect of the internet in combating commercial sexual

exploitation of children and rather countered the negative image of the internet in this field.

General Conclusions

Personal Remarks

A number of general conclusions could be drawn from the presentations and discussions that were held during the day. Before discussing this, it is important that, as Rapporteur, I make a few personal remarks which pertain to my own involvement in this area and which I think are relevant to the future development of co-operation and collaboration.

First, it is of course a privilege to be involved as an independent commentator on proceedings at both the Tallinn and Stockholm meetings. But what is more significant is that, having been involved in both meetings, I feel able to comment on progress that has been made. It is clearly the case that the Tallinn conference was a very fruitful meeting and that the Stockholm meeting derived its main agenda from the discussions held earlier in Estonia. The continuity and development of thinking and ideas must inevitably be an important element in the establishment of a network based on the principles of open and free exchange of information and of collaboration..

Second, though I do of course respect the views expressed by one or two delegates to the conference about the importance of bilateral agreements and arrangements, there is to the outsider such as myself something very clearly distinctive about the Baltic Region

and the relationship of the countries within it. As emphasised in Tallinn, and in other fora in which such issues are discussed, "regional" activity is extremely important in a global context and provides a ready framework for collaboration and sharing of ideas, expertise and knowledge. This is particularly so where there is a shortage of resources, skills, experience etc. in some of the countries which are members of a particular regional grouping. Regional groupings do allow for closer integration into global networks if that is an objective.

Third, there is clearly a sense of continuity and development since the Tallinn conference in as much as , in the judgement of the Rapporteur, there has been a move from general issues and awareness raising to discussion about more concrete, specific proposals.

Lastly, the benefit of having been involved in a number of *related* events is in being able to acknowledge the value of impetus, commitment and motivation in taking forward ideas and proposals. Thematic development is much more constructive, in my view, than fragmented and discrete events.

General Conclusions

Children at Risk

Though the conference at Tallinn and the meeting in Stockholm were concerned with commercial sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse, there was at both meetings agreement that such issues had to be seen in wider context of “children at risk”. This is so for a number of reasons.

First, it is clear that many children who are the victims of commercial sexual exploitation or other forms of abuse, are also at risk in other ways. For example, they may come from dysfunctional families; experience poverty and all its effects and implications, may be at risk of later offending or of drug use and so on. . The factors which put our children at risk in different ways may themselves be very similar

Second, and closely related, is that the development of measures to deal specifically with children who are the victims of exploitation and abuse have to be seen in the wider context of social policy and welfare measures designed to reduce the risks to which our children may be exposed.

Third, is that measures to combat commercial or other forms of exploitation of children have to be seen in the context of the opportunities and support given to *all* our children. It could be argued that the best way to reduce the risk that children will be the victims of abuse is by improving the life chances and opportunities of all our children in general. What is at stake, as commented upon by Mr Linckelmann during the Stockholm meeting, is not simply developing measures to prevent or deal with abuse and exploitation. It is rather more fundamental than that in that what may be required is a reappraisal of the status society gives to its children and the nature of the life experiences and opportunities afforded to them.

Fourth, and clearly related to what has gone before, is the importance of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in providing a set of minimum standards for all our children which is theirs *as of right*. The promotion of children's rights through the UN Convention, as discussed at Tallinn and indeed at Stockholm, provides an important mechanism through which integrated social policies can be developed in the best interests of the child. Addressing those risk factors which our children may experience; implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child will have important implications for the kind of society in which we wish our children to live. At the beginning of the Stockholm meeting Mrs Klingvall, quoting from 9 year old Charlotte, suggested that children are our future. Though I agree with that, in one important sense we have to make that future for them and the UN Convention provides a powerful mechanism for doing so by asking us to identify and deal with those factors which put all our children at risk.

None of this should be seen as diminishing the importance of developing measures and strategies to deal with commercial sexual exploitation and other forms of abuse. Quite the opposite, the argument is that such measures and strategies will be more effective if they are part of a wider attempt to develop measures for children at risk.

Collaboration and co-ordination

It is clearly not the case that nothing is being done in the Baltic region to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children. Quite the opposite in that from the presentations during the meeting and from what is known about other activities in the region, there is considerable time, effort, energies and resources devoted to the issue.

During the Stockholm meeting there was general agreement of the need to *collaborate* and for further collaboration in the field. However, what was also clear is that there is a need for *co-ordination* of those activities and programmes designed to prevent or deal with the consequences of commercial sexual exploitation and child abuse. Collaboration is not necessarily the same as co-ordination. The danger of collaboration without co-ordination is that this may lead to reduplication of effort; to the wastage of resources and to "reinventing the wheel".

Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Child Abuse

This point has of course been made before but it is worth repeating even after the deliberations at the Stockholm conference- the measures designed to prevent or combat the effects of "commercial sexual exploitation" on the one hand may not necessarily be the same as those for dealing with "child abuse". The two are not necessarily the same though they are closely related and there has to be some concern that the two concepts are used interchangeably as if they were the same. As Mr. Svedin outlined, there are many different forms of abuse and though related the causal factors and any treatment or preventive measures devised may be very different because they are dealing with what are to all intents and purposes different phenomena.

Neglect

Professor Stevenson, an eminent social work professor in the United Kingdom, has recently written on "the neglect of neglect"- that is, the way in which child protection and child care has been dominated recently by sexual abuse issues to the cost of other risks experienced by children. In particular, too little attention, she argues, has been paid to the neglect of our children and that "neglect" has become a less fashionable focus for intervention and examination.

It was a significant contribution of Mr. Svedin's remarks and of some of the discussion during the meeting that "neglect" was identified as an important factor in the risks faced by our children. In countries undergoing rapid social and economic transition the absence of resources, the failure of social assistance programmes and the lack of a welfare safety net, the growth of poverty, the inability of parents to support and care for their children- all these suggest that children may experience more "passive" forms of abuse such as neglect. Neglect can no longer be neglected.

No Hierarchy of problems

By this I mean, as was clear at the meeting, that there is no hierarchy in the occurrence of such behaviours as commercial exploitation of children or of sexual abuse. These can happen in any country at any point in time and no country is excluded or exempted

from their occurrence. What this reinforces of course is the view that the development of measures to deal with such phenomena within a region such as the Baltic sea region are best taken forward by a *partnership* of member states.

No country can make any definitive claim to have *the* solution to commercial sexual exploitation or child abuse because it is simply the case that it can surface in any country at any point in time. The fact that Mrs Klingvall alluded to two serious cases in Sweden which had occurred just before the Stockholm meeting is testimony in itself to the fact that it is a problem common to all countries, transcends national, political and geographical borders and will be best addressed by collaboration based on partnership.

Trust, Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

One of the key notions that could be derived from the discussions that took place during the conference was that of “trust”. The experts who addressed the meeting emphasised the serious traumatic effects of abuse and exploitation on children; the effects on their healthy growth and development and indeed the long term negative consequences for society as a whole. Nevertheless, as was intimated by a number of speakers, there is concern that children and their families may have good reason for having little “trust” in the very systems of care and law which have been established to protect them.

For example, it is still the case, as it was in the two cases referred to by Mrs Klingvall, that many children who are abused are the victims of abuse carried out by those in a position of responsibility for children and often in a position entrusted to them by the state. Children may be exposed to abuse and exploitation by members of the caring professions, teachers, residential child care workers and so on. Similarly, whilst in care abuse may be inflicted on some children by other children.

What we also have to remember, and this is repeated regularly at meetings such as the Stockholm conference, is that even where abuse has been identified, very few cases come to the attention of the authorities and even where they do, the number of cases which reach investigation stage and then prosecution followed by conviction are very, very few. The involvement of children and their families in such cases nevertheless has great emotional costs. Parents and children, as some of the literature suggests, may then have little trust in bringing cases to the attention of the authorities if the chances of conviction are low but the costs are very high for them.

As Ms Cederborg also suggested, the very system which is designed to protect children may fail to do so through the failure to accommodate children as credible witnesses in a context dominated by adult assumptions and values.

There is a clearly a need to address those aspects of our key social institutions in which it may be difficult for children and their families to locate their trust.

Don't lose the child

There are many individuals, organisations and agencies involved when a child has been identified as the victim of abuse or exploitation. Nevertheless, there is a danger that the child may somehow be "lost" amidst all the concern prompted by an allegation of abuse or that children's own views and perspectives are not sufficiently listened to. Thus Ms Cederborg identified the ways in which, though central to the evidential process, children's own stories about what happened may either be lost or may be interpreted from the point of view of the adult.

Similarly Mrs Taipale emphasised the importance of developing structures and arrangements which allowed children to participate in and directly influence the development of measures and policies which impact on their lives. Mrs Taipale's own presentation outlined the way in which certain Finnish projects sought as far as possible to involve and include the perspective of the child.

During the conference a poem was read by a Swedish actress in which it was made clear the pain and suffering of individual children could not be appreciated from the rather cold, bare statistics which are often considered in the development of policies. What it served to remind the conference is that what is being dealt with is the suffering of children as individuals- that we must not lose our sense of addressing or contact with that suffering as we seek to develop policies and measures. In a sense, we must not "lose" the child in our discussions and deliberations.

Offenders

As identified at the Tallinn conference particular emphasis was given to the need for more information about the nature of offending and the circumstances which put an individual at risk of abusing children. The development of measures to prevent child abuse and exploitation will be further enhanced and arguably more effective if they are, in some way, based upon a more adequate understanding of just why some people abuse and exploit children. What could be drawn from Ms Kjellgren and Mr. Svedin's presentations was that there is a thin dividing line between those who are the victims of abuse and those who are abusers.

Ethics and Values

The need to recognise the variety of ethics and values in different countries in the Baltic region was considered by a number of delegates to be very important in ensuring that *either* there was indeed a common language and common goals to be followed in collaborating in the development of measures and policies to deal with commercial sexual exploitation; *or*, that differences sufficiently great that they should be taken into consideration in seeking to develop measures on a collaborative basis. Denmark in particular promoted the idea that a priority should indeed be to exchange views and knowledge on the different ethical and value positions which could be identified around the region.

Knowledge, Expertise and Training

As at the Tallinn conference the need for exchange in knowledge and expertise was considered to be extremely important as was the plea for help in developing appropriate education programmes for professionals and indeed volunteers.

The Internet

The proposal by Mrs Klingvall that Sweden would provide finance for establishing a network which would deploy modern information technologies of course received particular attention and general acceptance as an important idea as a means of developing co-operation and collaboration around the region.

The main concern expressed was that there should be some co-ordinating structure established to oversee the development and operation of the network and to ensure that its potential was realised fully. The technical demonstration afforded by Telemedica involving a two way teleconference between Mr. Svedin and Prof. Schilkin in Moscow illustrated the many benefits such a mechanism might afford to a network operating across the internet. As an objective commentator on the demonstration and its value to the work in the Baltic region (though clearly committed to the value of modern technologies in the promotion of social welfare objectives) my judgement would be that the following benefits, bearing in mind some of the other general conclusions drawn from the conference, can be identified:-

- it is relatively cheap- important for countries for whom financial and other resources are scarce.
- it would meet a need for network building in the field.
- it would allow ready, quick and easy access to expertise and knowledge which might otherwise not be available.
- it would allow expertise and education to be developed relatively quickly for those countries who have expressed an urgent need for help in professionalising services.
- it could provide the basis for the development of distance learning and remote education and training programmes (as for example in the University of the Highlands in Scotland which is very dependent on web based technology for communication and learning).
- it would act as a doorway/clearing house to expertise and databases beyond the Baltic region.
- it also of course has the potential to accommodate children's involvement and participation

As Rapporteur on more than one occasion, I have I believe, made my own value base clear- that my concern is ultimately to improve and enhance the quality of the life

experiences of our children. There is no doubt in my mind that the deployment of information technology as demonstrated at the conference has the potential to contribute effectively to the development of expertise, knowledge, services and policies throughout the Baltic region to combat and deal with the commercial sexual exploitation and abuse of our children. The very positive statement made about the development of the Children's House in Iceland through the use of the internet clearly indicates the potential such an approach has. No claim is made that the use of a virtual meeting place would substitute for other measures and approaches- rather that it will in the future have a very important role to play.

If a recommendation can be made on the basis of these general conclusions it would be that in the interest of developing collaboration in the region; in the interest of providing access to information, knowledge and expertise; in the wish to develop best practices, further consideration should be given to identifying and developing the full potential of modern information technologies as suggested in the proposal made by Mrs Klingvall right at the beginning of the conference in her opening address.

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