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Region's governments urged to push through tough new measures on child prostitution, trafficking and online sexual exploitation

18 September 2008

Geneva, Switzerland – Despite some progress in recent years in addressing the problem of sexual exploitation of children in Europe and Central Asia, much more needs to be done to address the issue. This includes identifying child victims and providing appropriate support for their recovery and reintegration, closer cooperation between services and among countries in the region and tougher enforcement of the laws to address the demand for sexual exploitation of children.

These were the key messages heard at the “Europe and Central Asia Regional Preparatory Meeting for the World Congress III against Sexual Exploitation of Children & Adolescents” – a two-day meeting held to feed recommendations to an upcoming world congress¹ on sexual exploitation of children.

Hundreds of experts, government officials and activists from around the region attended the meeting, which was held at the ILO Conference Centre in Geneva, Switzerland and which ended on Thursday with recommendations specific to Europe and Central Asia on how to end the scourge of sexual exploitation of children.

Mr. Geir Myrstad of the ILO reminded those present that the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182 calls on all ILO member States to undertake immediate and effective measures to prohibit commercial sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, pornography, and trafficking, and that under the ILO Global Action Plan on child labour the 182 member States of the ILO have committed themselves to eliminate commercial sexual exploitation of children by 2016. “Let us join together – governments, employers’ organizations, workers’ organizations and civil society – to make commercial sexual exploitation of children history by 2016”

“Progress has been made – particularly with the recent development of the Council of Europe Convention on protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation - but the fact is that Europe and Central Asia continue to see large numbers of children exploited, so enforcement of these legal instruments is essential” said Mark Capaldi, Deputy Director of ECPAT International, an NGO focused on ending child prostitution, pornography and trafficking. “The region continues to see large numbers of

¹ The World Congress III against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents will be held in Rio de Janeiro from 25-28 November. More than 3,000 participants comprised of governments, civil society, international organisations, private sector, children and young people are expected to attend this global forum convened to map out the actions that have to be taken to combat the sexual exploitation of children. For more information, see www.ecpat.net/worldcongressIII

children sexually exploited and this regional meeting has called for the necessary measures and strategies to urgently address the demand for sex with children”.

Led by ECPAT International and the ILO, the meeting’s attendees discussed – for the upcoming World Congress III against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents in Brazil – a set of time-bound goals and targets to mitigate the issues of children trapped in prostitution, trafficking of children, online sexual exploitation and the distribution of sexual abuse images of children.

The goals and targets to address child prostitution, trafficking and online sexual exploitation include:

- The region’s legislation must be harmonized (eg, not all countries in the region make a legal distinction between child pornography and other forms of pornography, which has bearing on law enforcement) and penalties must be increased so that sentences reflect the severity of crimes related to the sexual exploitation of children.
- Internet service providers, mobile phone companies and financial institutions must work together to address the problems of child abuse images and sexual exploitation of children online, including blocking access to child abuse images found on websites.
- Adopt multilateral agreements for the coordination of police investigation work on victim identification of trafficked children and children sexually exploited online or in the production of child abuse images. All law enforcement agencies in the region must connect to the G8 database at Interpol.
- Hotlines should be developed for receiving reports on child abuse online.
- Develop legislation that can stimulate business to implement child protection programs, including small businesses such as cyber cafes and encouraging the travel and tourism sector to implement and monitor the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.²
- Set up a global reporting system for extraterritorial cases involving tourists that exploit children while abroad. Currently, while most of the region’s countries have extraterritorial laws (which are useful when perpetrators return to their countries of origin in an effort to escape prosecution) to punish offenders in their home country for offences committed abroad, these laws are rarely enforced.
- National policies to prevent and combat CSEC should guarantee that children have access to high quality basic education and skills training as well as opportunities for those who are old enough (above the minimum working age) to earn a decent salary in conditions that are not hazardous. Likewise, measures should be taken to integrate concerns regarding CSEC in poverty reduction strategies, education, law, law enforcement, youth employment and anti-discrimination initiatives – including against gender discrimination, where possible in integrated National Action Plans.

For further information or media interviews please contact:

² The Code is an industry tool to combat child sex tourism. Tour operators and tourism organisations that adopt and sign the Code of Conduct commit themselves to informing customers on their child protection policy, training of staff, reporting cases and application of other measures to protect children. For more information, see www.thecode.org.

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Notes to editors:

- ECPAT International is a global network of organisations and individuals working together for the elimination of child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes. It seeks to encourage the world community to ensure that children everywhere enjoy their fundamental rights free and secure from all forms of commercial sexual exploitation. For more information, see www.ecpat.net