FLORENCE CALL FOR ACTION

The European Children’s Network – United Nations Meeting
13-14 November 2006 in Florence, Italy

On 13 and 14 November 2006 UNICEF and the European Children’s network hosted the 2nd annual UN – European Children’s Network meeting to discuss the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Europe, EU implementation of the Commission Communication – "Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child" and European follow-up to the World Fit for Children+5 review in the UN General Assembly. Those gathered included representatives from UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO, European and national children’s rights NGOs, European Commission officials, the European Parliament, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Council of Europe.

Call to Action to the EU Member States

Recalling that all EU Member States have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we call on all EU Member States to safeguard the inclusion of children’s rights in the European Constitutional Treaty or any newly agreed Treaty. As one means of implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Europe, we call on the EU Member States to adopt and support the full implementation of the Commission Communication – “Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child”.

Call to Action addressed to the European Union Institutions

The European Children's Network, UNICEF, UNHCR and WHO welcome the work of President Barroso as chair of the Commissioners Group on Fundamental Rights, Equality and Non-Discrimination and the European Commission on the Commission Communication – “Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child” and their commitment to ensuring that the European Union acts “as a beacon to the rest of the world” on children’s rights.⁴ We especially welcome the EU’s commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as its fundamental reference and the basis guiding its work.

1. We welcome the Commission’s commitment, expressed in the Communication, to promoting and safeguarding children’s rights in EU internal and external policies and to taking several important organisational and process steps to develop a new and more comprehensive approach.

We urge the Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the EU Member States to:

Organisation
• Clarify the mandate and provide appropriate resources to the Commissioner responsible for children’s rights, to the Commission Interservice Group that will guide implementation of the Communication and to the children’s

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rights unit and coordinator that will support work on children’s rights across the Commission Directorate Generals.

- Convoke the European Forum for the Rights of the Child to provide expert advice on a regular basis to the EU institutions on children’s rights, to contribute to the development of all EU strategies, policies, legislation, and activities affecting children inside and outside the EU, to monitor the effect of EU actions on children, and to provide strategic advice on evolving concerns and gaps in action that could usefully be addressed at the EU level. The members should include the EU institutions, expert regional and international organisations, civil society and children themselves, organised in a children’s expert group. We strongly recommend the Forum be supported by an independent expert body that meets regularly with the mandate and resources for further research.

Processes

- Adopt a comprehensive approach when developing the EU Children’s Rights Strategy, incorporating expert advice from the European Forum, relevant reports and analyses from expert bodies such as the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Council of Europe, UNICEF and other children’s rights organisations. The Strategy should be prepared in consultation with, and when appropriate the participation of, children as well as other knowledgeable partners, and be supported by sufficient financial and human resources. It should also be based on the assessment outlined in the Communication of “the effectiveness of its existing action (legislative and non-legislative, internal and external) affecting children.” This assessment should take into account, in particular, the four general principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- Support the commitment to including children’s rights in both internal and external actions of the EU with a robust approach to “mainstreaming” children’s rights into EU actions, policies and legislation, by developing relevant tools, training and legislative screening in consultation with the European Forum and other experts on children’s rights.

- Establish genuine mechanisms for meaningful child participation in EC decisions, which can include the website suggested but should also include opportunities for dialogue, and avenues for input into the European Forum and into legislation and policy development.

- Encourage EUROSTAT to draw on lessons learned from UNICEF, ChildONEurope and others in systematically collecting disaggregated data on children and in promoting data analysis and dissemination to inform needed policy development and resource mobilisation.

2. We also recognise that the Communication identifies a number of specific actions. We urge the Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the EU Member States to:

- Deliver on these actions according to the timeline in the Communication.

- Use a wide, multifunctional definition of child poverty that incorporates the income and non-income dimensions and in particular, set time-bound goals and use all available resources to accelerate the elimination of child poverty.

- Ensure follow-up action on the recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children both within the EU’s internal and external policies, and by
supporting the appointment of a special representative for violence against children.

3. Bearing in mind the universal application of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we call on EU institutions and EU member states to ensure that all children in the EU, regardless of their nationality or status, benefit from actions and policies to realise children’s rights. Any actions and policies affecting stateless, asylum-seeking, refugee and more generally migrant children should be based on the core concepts of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child including the principles of non discrimination and the best interests of the child.

Call to Action Addressed to European Governments and Regional Organisations Five Years after the World Fit for Children Special Session

We remind governments in Europe and Central Asia of their commitments in the World Fit for Children UN General Assembly Resolution S-27/2 and note that while action has been taken to deliver on these commitments, robust follow-up is still required. We therefore urge Governments to:

• Put in place effective national legislation, policies and action plans and allocation of resources to fulfil and protect the rights of the child; to develop national monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the impact of policy actions on children; and to strengthen national bodies for the promotion and protection of children’s rights, including, when they do not yet exist, National Commissioners or Ombudspersons for children’s rights who should be independent and responsible for monitoring the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child within the Member States.

• Ensure access to quality education for all children without discrimination; promoting access to highest standards of health care for all children whether in or out of hospital; taking measures to protect children from the effects of HIV/AIDS; promoting a Europe wide ban on all forms of violence against children.

As we move forward, we encourage:

• Governments and civil society to promote genuine children’s participation in decisions that affect them and ensure that children and young people are provided information about their rights in a child friendly manner.

• The EU, the Council of Europe, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF and the soon-to-be-established EU Fundamental Rights Agency to promote an on-going exchange of information and reports on their actions on children’s rights, with a view to ensuring enhanced coordination and effectiveness in the region. This enhanced cooperation should help support the implementation of the EC Communication while at the same time building the regional integration called for in the World Fit for Children resolution.