



Progress towards implementing the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2012-2015

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Madam Chair,
Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. It is very nice to be here in Dubrovnik.

First of all I would like to thank the Croatian Deputy Prime minister and Minister for Social Policy and Youth - Ms Milanka Opačić - for hosting this High Level meeting. I am also grateful to the Council of Europe for the work with the Strategy for the Rights of the Child.

Building international standards in this field, is vital for strengthening children's rights. Norway strongly believes that children's rights apply to every child, regardless of their sex, social or ethnic background, religion or gender identity.

Violence has a devastating effect on individuals, communities and societies - and bears significant economic costs for countries. Not the least for my own country Norway!

The Convention of the Right of the Child has been a part of Norwegian law for years and the legal framework is in place. But despite all good efforts to create a safe life situation for all children, abuse and violence is still a challenge to be addressed.

We recently had both Norwegian and international reports with alarming numbers. Reports telling us that sexual abuse, domestic violence and rape are a large problem for children and adults alike. Together with the three Ministries of Education, Justice and Health, I put forward 42 measures to fight violence.

Ladies and gentlemen – we cannot rest as long as one child is unsafe!

These issues are sensitive and connected to old taboos. To share experiences is more important than ever in order to find new ways to address and prevent violence against children.

Investing in children and youth is important for any society. It has more positive long-term results for individuals and society than later investments. This is an important point, as we have

seen that the advancement of children's rights has been affected by instability in the world economy in recent years.

When dealing with the rights of the child it is important how we look at, and treat children and how children understand themselves.

Children want to be treated as individuals, and they want their contact with professionals to be based on mutual trust and respect. Children must be treated as bearers of their own rights - and they must be legally empowered to defend those rights.

Empowering children is not charity. Our youngest should be seen as resources and as people with ideas and expectations of their own - with ability to influence decisions. When they have the right tools, children and youngsters are able to make good solutions to the challenges they face!

Children must be informed and aware of their rights - so they can be able to promote and stand up for them. They also need to be informed in a way they can understand. Training and education of those who work for - and with - children is vital.

In Norway we have recently strengthened the children's rights to participation. The Child Welfare Act now clearly states that children are entitled to express their opinion during the whole child welfare case.

Also, children under the care of the child welfare are now entitled to bring someone they trust when they are attending meetings with the child welfare service. The trust person will give the child a stronger feeling of security and help the child's ability to express its own views.

Another important change is in the Children Act.

The Child perspective in parental disputes includes young children's right to participate and to be given the opportunity to be heard. This may be on matters like parental responsibility, where to live permanently and the child's right of access to the parents.

The child shall be informed about this right to express its view - and be informed about the decision - and about how the child's view has been taken into account.

Children, who receive information - and the possibility to express their own views, will more easily understand contexts and be more positive to interact on solutions.

We believe that more participation will give better solutions - and better decisions.

Finally, the right of the child to express her or his views continues to be challenged - by cultural attitudes as well as political and economic barriers. When I grew up we had a world where children should be seen, but not heard. Today - children should be heard as well as seen. And this should be our guiding principle.

I wish you all the best outcome of this meeting.

Thank you.