

**Consideration of the Initial Report of the Republic of Estonia to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography submitted under Article 12 of the Optional Protocol by the Committee on the Rights of the Child**

**Introductory Statement by**

**H. E. Marten Kõkk**

**Secretary-General**

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia**

Madame Chairperson,

Honourable Members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Estonian delegation welcomes the opportunity to present to the distinguished members of the Committee the Report of Estonia. As this is our first report on the implementation of the Optional Protocol, we are especially looking forward to the constructive dialogue with the Committee and will do our best to assist the Committee's consideration of our report to the greatest extent possible. In this statement I would like to introduce our report and provide an overview of the recent developments in Estonia after the submission of the report in spring 2008.

Firstly, I would like to emphasise the importance of a comprehensive and coherent national approach towards the protection of children from all forms of violence and abuse, including in the fields outlined in the Optional Protocol. In this regard, Estonia has had over the years several development plans covering different areas related to the protection of children. The "Strategy for Guaranteeing the Rights of the Child", which was in force in 2004- 2008 as a development plan coordinated the field of children's rights and also entailed provisions related to the prevention of abuse of children and other areas covered by the Optional Protocol. Activities related to the prevention of the trafficking of children were included in the Development Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2006-2009.

Currently, in 2010, Estonia has initiated the compilation of the “Children’s and Family Policy Development Plan”, which will also include the matters related to children’s rights and family welfare.

The “Development Plan for Tackling Violence” was initiated in 2009 to intensify the combat against violence and it concentrates on decreasing offences committed against and by children as well as domestic violence and human trafficking. The elaboration of the development plan is coordinated by the Ministry of Justice who has involved also various government agencies, non-governmental organisations and citizens’ forums in the process.

Combating sexual offences against children is the main criminal policy priority in Estonia, as outlined in the *Laulasmaa* Declaration adopted by the Minister of Justice and the Minister of the Interior in 2005. In this respect, several steps have been taken in the recent years:

- The punishments for sexual offences against children have been made more severe;
- Regarding the prevention of sexual offences, the possibilities to set restrictions to working with children as well as to issue restraining orders and preventive detention have been introduced.
- The draft law criminalising grooming has been prepared and presented to the Parliament.
- Active discussions concerning the possibilities to enhance the protection of children from sexual abuse have taken place widely. For example, in 2009, the issue of raising the age-limit of sexual self-determination was under discussion in the Parliament; there have been public discussions on the necessity of a registry of sexual offenders and their medical treatment and the sufficiency of restrictions to working with children. In 2009, the Ministry of Justice in its analysis on treatment of sexual offenders in the legal system found that a system of medical treatment should be developed to decrease the recidivism of sexual offenders.

Also in 2010 one of the priorities of the Estonian Police is combating offences against minors and committed by minors. It has always been considered important that the proceedings related to offences regarding minors were conducted speedily and were as minimally traumatising to the child as possible. As of 2010 there are special child protection services in every police prefecture in Estonia. Proceedings of criminal cases concerning child victims will be conducted by specially-trained officials who are qualified in the treatment of child

victims of criminal offences. The Estonian Police is also actively carrying out activities concerning giving guidance to minor offenders to reintegrate to the society.

I would also like to emphasise that the importance of the internet safety has significantly grown in Estonia, as due to the spread of internet crime the scope of the problems related to the abuse of children has expanded and changed.

Therefore, matters related to internet crime, including activities in the internet harmful to children, is also one of the main priorities of the Police in 2010. There are special units tackling the matter and the police are searching for leads concerning the abuse of children on the Internet as well as in reality also on their own initiative. Internet channels popular among children and therefore attractive to persons suspected of pedophilia are supervised; public internet comment sites and sites involved in mediation of prostitution are monitored.

Regarding the Internet safety, the main emphasis is placed on preventive work with children, parents and the whole society. In 2009, the Estonian Union for Child Welfare in cooperation with state agencies filed a project application to join the European Union Programme "Safer Internet Plus" to receive support for opening a hotline for reporting inappropriate internet contents and a helpline for providing counselling on the matter. The project also foresees vast training and awareness-raising activities among parents and children.

I will now continue with introducing priorities and positive developments in other fields of child protection in Estonia.

Promoting the idea of positive parenting has become a very important priority in preventive work, as the positive child-raising method is the most efficient measure of child protection. In 2009, a roundtable on parental education was initiated by the Ministry of Social Affairs, at which several non-governmental organisations engaged in supporting parenting. The matter is also set as a priority in the development plan of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

During the recent years many social campaigns have been organised. For example, regarding the prevention of the risk behaviour, in 2008, a sexual health campaign "Conscious Choice" was carried out. Estonia also joined a campaign initiated by the Council of Europe on corporal

punishment "Hands are for holding, not punishing". A campaign "You are a role-model" was also carried out to promote positive parenting.

In order to facilitate reporting of a child in danger and in need of help, the Ministry of Social Affairs opened a national helpline 116 111, which is uniform children's helpline number in Europe. In addition to the possibility to report of children in need of help, this helpline provides information and counselling to both children and adults. Several campaigns have been carried out in 2009 to promote this helpline, especially among children.

As mentioned, various project-based initiatives have been carried out during recent years both in social work and crime prevention. We find it essential, however, to move from the project-based preventive work in the direction of a more systematic and consistent preventive work by implementing evidence-based practices, early detection and intervention principles, awareness-raising of the public and enhancing parental skills.

In order to coordinate the policies related to the welfare of children and families more effectively, a separate department for child and family policies is being created within the structure of the Ministry of Social Affairs in the beginning of the year 2010. The main tasks of the department for the next year is the elaborating of the Children's and Family Policy Development Plan, improvement of the Child Protection Act, promotion of parental education and prevention of violence against children. One of the first tasks in 2010 is to enact the prohibition of corporal punishment of children in the Child Protection Act.

The Chancellor of Justice has over many years given serious consideration to the activities concerning rights of children and has regularly carried out spot visits to special establishments of children. As regards the setting up of the institution of a children's ombudsman, the subject is currently under active discussion in Estonia. There have been several roundtables and discussions organised on different levels, where representatives of the Parliament, relevant ministries, the Office of the Chancellor of Justice and various non-governmental organisations have participated.

Madam Chairperson,

In the context of international legal framework, we are glad to inform you that the Government of Estonia approved recently the Council of Europe Convention on Action

against Trafficking in Human Beings. In 2008, Estonia also signed the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse and we are currently in the process of its ratification.

In October 2008, Estonia welcomed Ms Najat M'jid Maalla, the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, whose positive encouragement and recommendations for further work have greatly contributed to the developments I have referred to.

As a conclusion, I would like to reiterate that Estonia has taken serious steps in the recent years in tackling the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. We are aware that a lot remains to do, and we are constantly working towards better ensuring the rights of children.

Honourable Madame Chairperson, honourable members of the Committee, we would like to thank you for your kind attention. The delegation is looking forward to a mutually beneficial and efficient exchange of ideas and we hope to do our best to assist the Committee in the deliberations on the Estonian report.