

It is an honour and a pleasure to attend this meeting on behalf of the Government of Iceland and have the opportunity to provide the distinguished members of this Committee with further information on the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the rights of the child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. I will begin my presentation by addressing several issues regarding the implementation of the Optional Protocol on the on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in Iceland.

Application of the Optional Protocol in Iceland rests mainly within the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Social Affairs. I would like to give a brief summary on some of the recent measures taken to implement the Protocol during the reporting period. I will limit my presentation to the main recent developments.

As reflected in the report, two extensive statutes have in the last years been enacted in Iceland concerning children, the Child Protection Act, No 80/2002, and the Children's Act, No. 76/2003. In addition, several amendments to the legislation have been made giving further protection to the rights of children, covered by the Protocol. For instance a special provision on trafficking in human beings was added to the General Penal Code in 2003. The same year, penalties for sexual offences against children were increased.

Furthermore, I would like to mention that since the submission of the Government's report, the Government has submitted two bills amending the Penal Code during the present parliament session, which contain provisions strengthening the protection of children in respect of sexual offences and child pornography.

Firstly, it is proposed that young age of victims should influence the determination of a sentence in case of a rape. It is commented in the explanations to the bill that young victims have little psychological or physical strength to defend themselves, and relatively little violence or minor threat can appear major to children. To underline the seriousness of sexual offences against children the bill proposes that if a victim is younger than 18 it should influence the determination of a sentence as an aggravating factor.

Secondly, an amendment is proposed to the General Penal Code in order to make necessary legislative amendments in connection to the ratification of the European Convention on Cybercrime. Amongst the proposals is a proposed amendment to the provision on child pornography. The proposal underscores that the provision covers not only procurement of child pornography through a computer system for oneself, but also for another person.

As regards other measures than legislative changes, I would like to mention that a cooperation between the Icelandic Police and Internet Service Providers in Iceland is under consideration, with respect to establishment of content filters, preventing users to access web-sites containing child pornography. It is hoped that the alliance will be realized in few months.

I would also like to address some of the statistics requested by the Committee. If I may refer to the table presented in our written replies, the first observation is that there is no record of cases of sale of children or child prostitution during the reporting period. With respect to child pornography, we do have several cases on the possession of child pornography, as illustrated in the table. Two or three cases involved Icelandic children, or children within Icelandic jurisdiction.

We will give further clarification to these statistics later today, if the Committee so wishes.

As regarding the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, it has to be borne in mind that Iceland has no national armed forces and thus no military criminal code. As illustrated in our written replies to the Committee, Icelandic law does not contain specific provisions on recruitment of children in armed forces/groups. It is however important to bear in mind that other legal provisions could be applicable in the prosecution of such crime.

If I may, I would like to highlight recent developments with respect to the government's development assistance, as presented in our written replies.

The Government of Iceland has increased substantially official development assistance in recent years and further measures are envisaged. Last year a comprehensive policy on Iceland's development cooperation for the period 2005-2009 was presented. The policy rests on four pillars with children rights featuring prominently in two pillars.

Progress has already been made in terms of implementing the Government's emphasis on childrens' rights. Contributions to UNICEF more than doubled between 2004 and 2005. In 2006 the partnership with UNICEF will be further enhanced with the launching of a new programme for Icelandic junior professional officers.

Iceland has for a number of years seconded experts to UNIFEM in the Balkans to work on the promotion of gender equality and womens' rights. This work has direct relevance for efforts to help children victims of armed conflict. The Government has decided to significantly increase its support to this programme.

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I have now highlighted only a few issues which are covered in our report(s) and written replies to the Committee. We would like to express our hope that the information provided in the report(s), the written answers, and the additional information given today will prove sufficient for the Committee to evaluate Iceland's implementation of the Optional Protocol on the on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. (and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict). We look forward to discuss these matters with the Committee and I hope we can give the information requested.

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