

Opening speech by Minister of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, Ms. Solveig Horne,
03.09.2015

Madam Chair, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning – and welcome to all of you.

I know many of you have come a very long way to be here these days, to discuss and exchange knowledge on this very important topic: How to ensure children protection against violence.

First of all, I would like to thank the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children, Marta Santos Pais, as well as Plan International, for organizing this important expert consultation.

I am also delighted that my colleague; the Minister for Women Empowerment and Child Protection in Indonesia, Yohana Yambise, is here today. I look forward to hear your presentation.

I am glad to see many experienced policy makers and experts here today. Both from the professional field and from organizations worldwide.

Violence against children is an issue of critical importance. Violence has devastating and long lasting effects on individuals, communities and societies.

In fact, a recent study suggests that violence and abuse against children have higher economic costs than war, civil war and terrorism combined.

In other words, we have an enormous task ahead of us. Our common goal should be that no children are subjected to violence - or any other forms of abuse.

The Norwegian Government wants to take part – both nationally and globally - in combating abuse and violence against children.

Co-operation, as well as sharing knowledge and competence across borders is vital in the fight against violence and abuse.

Last year, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child with a large national conference in Oslo - addressing violence against children. About 800 people attended.

Thank you Marta, for your excellent video greeting at the conference!

The convention has set the agenda for Norway's policy concerning children and their families. We have made significant progress towards securing the rights of children. The Convention is implemented into Norwegian law through the Human Rights Act (2003).

An important feature of this act is that it has precedence. This means that all Norwegian legislation must be in accordance with the Convention.

We also know that violence is used in upbringing children in many parts of the world. Norway is one of the 46 countries that has banned corporal punishment of children.

But we know that having formal rights is not sufficient. Unfortunately, violence against children is still a major social problem, and a public health concern – also in Norway.

Recent studies show that violence affects a number of children and youth in Norway. For many, the violence starts in early childhood. These children may suffer the effects for the rest of their lives.

With good preventive measures, treatment and support, we can help to reduce the devastating effects of violence.

Efforts to fight violence and abuse against children demand cooperation, competence and willingness to act.

I can promise you that the Government is not resting. In November last year, celebrating the convention - we launched a new action plan to intensify the efforts against violence and abuse.

The action plan is called *A good childhood lasts a lifetime*. It combines the joint effort of four ministries.

The plan has the following target areas:

- prevention and good parenting
- the responsibility of the public authorities

- child and youth participation
- cross-professional collaboration and the voluntary sector
- right help and treatment at the right time
- research and expertise

Our Parliament has already decided that our efforts to combat violence against children should be further strengthened the years to come.

To combat violence successfully, we need measures at the local level. Families and children live in local communities.

It is therefore essential that municipalities, as well as local professional groups, take an active part in this work. It is also important to involve the private and voluntary sectors.

The government recently introduced a new grant programme to provide support for children who have been exposed to violence. Grant recipients include foundations and voluntary organisations.

Combating violence and sexual abuse is not a private matter. We can all make a difference in the lives of children and youth at risk.

There is no excuse for looking the other way.

I strongly believe in preventative efforts. In my view, good parenting is the most effective preventive strategy.

Confident parents are more likely to be able to give their children a safe childhood.

Giving help and support to parents contributes to giving better conditions for their children as well.

If children do not receive proper care in their own home, the health and social services should intervene at an early stage.

Norway will now implement the internationally acclaimed parenting programme *Nurse Family Partnership*.

The target group is young first time mothers – and fathers – at risk.

Parents are given help by specially trained nurses, from early pregnancy and up until the child's second birthday.

Last year, I visited the London borough of Lambeth, where I met with both nurses and young parents participating in the programme.

The parents told me how they had become more confident in taking care of their children.

It was both impressive and encouraging to hear their stories.

It is also important to uncover family violence during pregnancy. Last year we introduced routine questions about violence in connection with maternity check-ups. This is done as a regular practice.

We have also established a grant scheme for municipalities to provide funding for parental guidance and parental support programmes.

The large number of applications for such funding shows that this type of services is highly needed.

It has also been an important task for me to strengthen the Family Counselling Service. This is a low-threshold, state financed service.

It is aimed at families with relational problems and includes counselling, guidance and therapy.

The service is offered to couples, families or individuals who experience difficulties, conflicts or violence within the family.

The Family Counselling Service is now strengthening its competence on violence within the family. A therapeutic service will be developed for families and children who live with violence as well as for young violent offenders.

Selected family counselling services for children will build up a high degree of expertise on violence. These offices will assist other family counselling offices.

I would also like to stress the need for competence among everyone who comes into contact with children and youth in their day-to-day work.

They must dare to ask difficult questions, and listen to the stories that emerge.

We know that children are very reluctant to talk about violence and abuse, especially if it takes place in their own family.

When teachers, pre-school teachers and public health workers strongly suspect that a child is being subjected to violence, they have a duty to take action and to inform the child welfare service or the police.

Our action plan emphasizes that violence and sexual assaults must be included in both basic and further education and training of professionals working with children.

We are also launching nationwide training programs on how to talk to children about violence and sexual assault for employees who meet children through their work.

This fall, my ministry will appoint an expert group to analyse a selection of serious cases in which children and youth have been the victims of violence and sexual abuse.

The purpose is to uncover weakness and challenges in how the public services handle the cases. This expert group is the first of its kind in Norway.

Furthermore, we need to get children themselves engaged. Young people often impresses me when we meet and they tell me their stories.

Children and youth need knowledge about their body, sexuality, violence and abuse from an early age.

This is how they can learn to identify unacceptable behaviour and talk about difficult experiences.

The information for children and youth must be easily accessible and understandable.

Fighting violence and sexual abuse against children and youth is our most important contribution towards fulfilling the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We cannot rest until the rights of all children are fully respected.

I hope you all will engage in fruitful discussions and dialogue throughout these days here at the conference.

We need international dialogues because we need to strengthen our knowledge, and to learn from best practises.

There is no such thing as one single solution to the challenges we are facing. We are all responsible for protecting children from violence and injustice.

A good childhood last a lifetime!

Thank you!