

Your Highness, Honourable Members of the European Parliament, Ladies and gentlemen

It is indeed a pleasure to be here with you today, as we discuss the plight of missing children in Europe. Childhood should be a time of discovery and adventure, a time to be loved and nurtured, and not exploited and hurt in any way.

As a society, we are duty bound to ensure that each and every child has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential, and that their dreams are not shattered. For these reasons, the wellbeing of children should be our primary concern.

As a member of the Patrons' Council, I especially congratulate the Missing Children Europe for focusing on Unaccompanied Minors during their conference last year.

I have touched this crisis first hand; when I held a child who had just witnessed his whole family drown at sea in their quest for a better life, and was left all alone in the world.

I personally saw that the outcome for the child was a positive one, but there are thousands of children who are not so fortunate.

Unaccompanied children carry the scars of having lived through war; fought as soldiers, experienced sexual, psychological and physical abuse, labour and other forms of exploitation. Some are exposed to abuse and exploitation along the way.

We should not allow further trauma or anxiety for the children, but ensure their care; and listen to their dreams, hopes, desires, anxieties, fears and sufferings of life.

The problem of missing unaccompanied migrant minors is a vast and complex challenge, which can only be addressed effectively through a coordinated strategic approach among member states, including the different stakeholders concerned.

It is important to keep the child, and his or her wellbeing, at the focus of our efforts in protecting all children of the world from callous, uncaring abusers and criminal gangs acting as traffickers.

Indeed, a concerted effort is required at international, regional and national levels, to immediately have a holistic approach, policy and concrete action, if we are to really address the issue of missing children and bring it to the fore of our discourse.

My hope is that we can give children the opportunity to dream and to enjoy their lives, and to see them smile again.