

Telefono Azzurro Conference

The strength of the network: The multidisciplinary approach as a tool to combat child sexual abuse 18 November 2022

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Good afternoon

**As we commemorate the World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence, I recall the painful words of a young survivor of sexual abuse , and I want to share what she told me with you:**

***“Fears that will be with me forever started haunting me at night.***

***I was scared.***

***Scared of hearing the footsteps and hear the door open again.***

***I soon learned the game. It was very familiar.***

***The feelings.***

***The touch.***

***The smell.***

***The pain.***

***I know that if I speak, they will help me and make a stop to this.***

***I did speak.***

***I tried reaching out.***

***Tried hard to explain to the people around me to HELP ME AND MAKE  
A STOP TO WHAT WAS HAPPENING.***

***However, nothing happened.***

***No one made a stop to the ABUSE.***

***Why should I believe in people, who tell me they care and love me?***

***Sexual abuse robbed me of my CHANCE TO LIVE.***

***And what about the people who abused me?***

***They are living their life with their loved ones.***

***I will not give up.”***

**End quote**

**This is an experience that I heard personally, and which will remain  
with me forever.**

**And yes, this is my message to us and to all the people and  
stakeholders that matter.**

**NO CHILD SHOULD BE ROBBED OF THEIR LIFE.**

**We need to remember that sexual exploitation and abuse on a child, comprises a lifetime of pain and trauma.**

**This is too high a price to pay for any human being.**

**On behalf of Eurochild, I would like to thank Professore Caffo and the team at Telefono Azzurro for your tireless initiatives to keep visibility to the worrisome concern of children's sexual exploitation and abuse.**

**I thank you for the important space that you are creating to bring together a network of like-minded organisations, academics, experts, and practitioners to share information, expertise, and good practices.**

**Coming together from diverse sectors on this important subject matter is so important and is fundamental to understand and work holistically against children sexual exploitation and abuse. That is why we must acknowledge the importance of the theme chosen for this conference. I personally believe that we can only be successful, if we strategically work together. I therefore reiterate my appreciation for the work by Telefono Azzuro in creating this multidisciplinary network. I truly believe that the only possible way, of successfully addressing this form of violence against children, is by a multidisciplinary approach.**

**On the other hand, I would also like to take this opportunity to convey my appreciation to Emilio Puccio, the Secretary General and the Members of the EU Inter-Parliamentary Group on Children's Rights, for driving the necessary legislations within the EU to stand up for Children's Rights and against all sort of violations against them.**

**We all know that the United Nations proclaimed the World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence in order to raise awareness on child sexual exploitation and abuse, and bring together stakeholders from around the world to prevent it.**

**In 2015, the United Nations had already highlighted the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse by including it in Agenda 2030 as one of the Sustainable Development Goals.**

**Target 16.2 specifically calls on the international community to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children, and requires the international community to:**

- reduce the stigma associated with child sexual abuse by establishing a global network of child sexual abuse survivors and advocates;**

- **deploy evidence-based prevention and detection efforts in communities, schools, recreational venues, faith-based organizations, and online to ensure the safety of all children;**
- **provide survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation, with access to essential health care services, including mental health and supportive services to help them heal; and**
- **ensure access to fair, child-focused, survivor-centered justice**

**In 2015, the Council of Europe established the European Day for the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, linked to the Universal Children’s Day.**

**An important milestone, in this area of protection, is undoubtedly The Council of Europe: Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, the Lanzarote Convention, which establishes the various forms of sexual abuse of children as criminal offences, including such abuse committed in the home or family, with the use of force, coercion, or threats.**

**Added to these international instruments are the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on Cybercrime.**

**Last year, we also saw the historic milestone of the European Commission in adopting a comprehensive EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse, whereby it cites eight areas**

**of action, that need to be taken up by all Member States to fight this scourge.**

**On the other hand, the World Health Organisation has declared that the prevalence of child sexual abuse, the serious consequences to victims' health and emotional well-being, and the fact that it is preventable, has placed child sexual abuse among the 24 risk factors contributing to the global burden of disease.**

**Since all the international instruments are there, why does sexual exploitation and abuse still exist and continues to grow?**

**We all need to step up our efforts and work together, i.e. including everyone as the representation of Cardinal O'Mally have said early. Yes we need to work together in a multidisciplinary approach to this multi-faceted crime, which has a multi effects and consequences for children.**

**We must leave no stone unturned. We must reach out to others. We need to continue to give visibility, advocate for more information and education to be available for the empowerment of children, parents and guardians.**

**We must unite all our diverse strengths in a multi disciplinary approach to endeavour for a preventive approach. we must try to be holistic in our response. we need to have multidisciplinary services to support.**

**We need to work for a European and Global harmonised Child Protection policy.**

**Sexual Exploitation and Abuse transcends borders and therefore it also needs a multilateral approach.**

**We need to be strong and courageous to provide for deterrents to try to curb to sexual exploitation and abuse, before it actually starts.**

**I just quoted a survivor of sexual abuse. It is so sad, however it is an important eye-opener for all of us to strive harder, to curb, and indeed, stop such abuse altogether.**

**To us every child matters.**

**The multitude of international and regional instruments, and guidelines, show clearly the way forward.**

**Many of our governments have expressed many a time, their political will through statements, media releases and conferences.**

**However, our children are stilling facing abuse, fear and uncertainty.**

**Children cannot continue to wait.**

**They have waited far too long.**

**We need political determination and action.**

**I appeal to all and one, we need to move beyond the rhetoric. We truly need to work together to bring about effective and tangible results.**

**Let us consult with the survivors, the children who have been through so much suffering. They are our experts, and they should have every opportunity to have their voices heard in safe spaces, that we need to provide.**

**Let us strive to educate and empower adults to read the signs of abuse, as many a time such signs are completely misinterpreted.**

**It takes a community to raise a child, as the African proverb says.**

**Let us be that community to save the child.**