

Statement on behalf of Terre des Hommes International Federation by Lucien Stöpler

At the presentation of the Opinion of the Section for Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship on the Protection of children at risk from travelling sex offenders (own-initiative opinion)

July 15, 2009

Good morning, thank you for the invitation to give comments for Terre des Hommes at this meeting.

Millions of children worldwide are forced into prostitution and every year, a million more enter. Europeans travel abroad and children are trafficked in: the type of child is the same: little care and protection, desperate for income. Easily tricked or forced. Most vulnerable children are found in countries where there is more than a measure of poverty: what makes children vulnerable is the crumbling of protection around them from parents, community and if that falls away, child protection agencies. Displacement is a situation where these factors are acutely present: due to conflict, disaster or the building of hydro-electric plants or big hotels in areas where communities are housed.

Not all places are named 'hot spots' when they really are, but this is due to a lack of data. Terre des Hommes urges the collection of more data on child sexual exploitation.

We are united in our condemnation of child sex tourism. If possible, we would take all vulnerable children to safe places, prosecute all of those who lure or force children into the industry, pimp them or exploit them. If we could, we would erase the memories and heal the scars of the exploited.

Terre des Hommes is pleased to see the existing political commitment to addressing child sexual exploitation in Europe. Only last year, Terre des Hommes worked with European Parliamentarians from all over Europe to promote recommendations against child sex tourism and the sexual exploitation of children. Other NGO's joined the campaign, called Say No!

The opinion paper of Section is broad and comprehensive. It covers prevention of sexual exploitation of children, prosecution of the perpetrators and protection of the victims. It focuses on stopping the perpetrator from abusing.

Terre des Hommes conducts research into child exploitation, including sexual exploitation in Latin America, East Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. We fund and manage programs address the phenomenon in a holistic way: prevention activities fighting vulnerability but also improvement of law enforcement and assistance to

exploited and abused children. On the basis of our experience I would like to comment the following.

The approach to focus on stopping the perpetrator is useful. We need more convictions, both in member States and abroad. Travelling sex offenders must see that the chance of getting caught is real. There is a lot to be gained by improving police information use and analysis. For example:

- Most people and organizations do not know what kind of information the police need to start an investigation into child sex tourism. Providing this information would be a quick win. It is a task that might be suitable for hotels and other tourist organizations to do in cooperation with the police.
- European police need to learn to access police in developing countries, since that takes a great amount of time and usually requires direct contact. The police hardly respond to Interpol alerts, let alone cooperating with them. Europol is still not used to analyse the data and compare it internationally, they are kept as far away as possible. National police and serious crime departments keep their information to themselves: they must be opened up! In Tanzania, Cambodia.
- Police do not share information with NGO's if that could lead this NGO to confirm a suspicion that there is a sex tourist active that the local police organization will not investigate. This is a legal obstacle requiring sensitive law changes. On the other hand, NGO's are happy to give police information if the police does good work with it; the police need to work with NGO's to combat the problem.
- Exchanging information via official channels, through the ministries of Exterior Affairs, just like has happened for 200 years now, is much too slow and leads to very poor information in the court of law, even acquittals of confirmed sex tourists. This is a political obstacle, since international conventions already eliminate most barriers to judicial cooperation. Not only the optional protocol to the CRC, also protocols to the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime.
- Any improvement in police in destination countries for sex tourism must be matched by an improvement in the magistrate and the judicial system.

I would like to commend the opinion paper for its stress on international partnerships. Terre des Hommes appreciates another political push in the right direction.

An approach that also works is by strengthening the resilience of the children themselves and the protection offered by the parents, community and the State systems. Enhancing the accessibility and quality of education, the safety of the child within home and community as well as the development of economic opportunities even for the most vulnerable would contribute in reducing the phenomenon. Children and their parents need to be informed about the dangers that they might face when coming in contacts with tourists and how to react in such situations. A few suggestions added here to those given by Ms. Sharma:

- Working with the child towards resilience and empowerment
- Strengthening the community around the child

- Accompanying the parents and the vulnerable communities towards economic empowerment
- Strengthening child protection agencies, that usually exist but falteringly. There is much more that these organizations can do!

For all the ideas here, the most important is that we are here, together, actively fighting child sex tourism. By its nature, child sex tourism is international, we must look beyond our borders to diminish it and actively engage other States in our efforts. At the same time, we must all go and engage the national governments of the European States, who must stop their citizens and who must help police abroad and here to convict those who proceed to victimize children for their own base pleasure. Thank you for your time and attention.