

**Call for action from Vilnius, Lithuania**  
**Oct 30-31, 2002**

Third Regional meeting of NGO Coalitions on the rights of the child in Europe

**Participants from 15 countries in Europe, all NGOs working in networks to promote implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) took part in the meeting.**

The aim of the Vilnius Regional NGO meeting is to explore how national NGO networks can work more effectively and efficiently, building on the work undertaken in the two previous forums (Berlin, March 1998 and Stockholm, May 1999). The meeting provided an opportunity to share NGO experiences across Europe and strengthen capacity and practice in promoting the rights of the child. The NGO community is aware of many groups of children whose rights are ignored and disrespected. Many experience discrimination, including Roma children, ethnic minority children, refugees and children with disabilities. Other children are living in institutions or on the streets, held in detention, being sexually exploited and trafficked, facing violence, poverty, and exclusion. Governments are not meeting the obligations they undertook in ratifying the Convention for these and many other children. Accordingly, the meeting calls upon political decision-makers at national and European level to commit to making the Convention a reality for children in Europe. We also encourage states parties of the CRC to integrate in their reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, any measures taken to develop National Plans of Action following the UN Special Session on Children in May 2002.

The past ten years has witnessed a dynamic growth of networks throughout Europe, committed to promoting and monitoring implementation of the CRC. These networks, comprising a wide membership of organisations throughout society, are accumulating a growing body of evidence of the failure of governments to comply with their obligations under the CRC. They are concerned to see a greater commitment to full implementation of children's rights. In pursuit of this goal, we urge all national NGO networks to undertake the following:

**Actions**

- To campaign and lobby national governments and members of the Convention on the Future of Europe, to include the rights of children in the revised EU treaty, currently being drafted;
- To urge, in the EU enlargement process, that children's rights are included as indicators of progress both during and after the accession to the EU, according to the Copenhagen Criteria 1993 on *'human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities'*;
- To maintain a commitment to participating in the reporting process to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and to develop follow up mechanisms for promoting implementation of the concluding observations. These follow up mechanisms should include dissemination and media campaigns, including to

children, to raise awareness of failings on the part of government to meet its obligations under the CRC;

- ❑ To explore and implement new and creative methods of promoting children's active involvement in decisions which affect their lives from the local, community, national through to European levels;
- ❑ To promote understanding on why children's active participation is essential in the work of NGO networks, and to develop and share strategies for actively engaging children and young people in their work;
- ❑ To stimulate the creation of children's organisations run by and for children themselves, and to recognise and provide support for adults working to facilitate the development of these organisations;
- ❑ To encourage and enable children in making their own reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child whenever the states party is due to report;
- ❑ To ensure that national action plans and strategies being developed by governments to achieve the goals of the Special Session on Children 2002 are fully compatible with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and reflect the views of NGOs, other sections of civil society and children themselves;
- ❑ To promote the establishment of independent statutory human rights institutions/commissioners/ombudsmen for children, according to the standards set by European Network on Children's Ombudsmen (ENOC);
- ❑ To encourage the creation of all party groups of parliamentarians to focus on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to encourage similar structures within the European Parliament.

#### Strategies

In order to strengthen national NGO networks in undertaking these tasks, the following strategies are recommended:

- ❑ To make greater use of existing services, such as CRIN ( Children's Rights Information Network) to develop an email network, for sharing information;
- ❑ To work towards strengthening NGO networks on the rights of the child through co-operation with other national networks such as those working in the fields of human rights, disability and environmental issues etc, both at country level and within the European region;
- ❑ To commit to mentoring and information exchange and collaboration between older and newer networks, in order to strengthen capacity and effectiveness;
- ❑ To hold forums every two years in Europe to exchange and share progress and to give consideration to mechanisms for including children in this process.