



PRESS BRIEFING September 17 2009

THE DIFFICULTIES FACED BY UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN OF THIRD COUNTRY ORIGIN IN THE EU: THE TIME HAS COME FOR EU ACTION.

Within the EU, there are at least 100,000 children of third country origin who are unaccompanied or separated from their families. In recent years, there have been increasingly frequent reports of the alarming situations in which these children can find themselves. Reports often concern disappearances from State care, children being trafficked into exploitation, return to third countries without proper safeguards, children in detention centres or in boats in the Mediterranean sea, attempting dangerous journeys.

In December 2009, the EU Member States are scheduled to establish a new five year EU programme in the field of justice, freedom and security (the widely anticipated "Stockholm Programme"). Save the Children has called for the Stockholm Programme to address the right of all unaccompanied and separated children of third country origin in the EU to receive the special protection and assistance. ***On September 21, the Justice and Home Affairs Ministers from around the EU are scheduled to have a first exchange views on possible common action in the field.***

In advance of the Ministers' meeting, on September 15, Save the Children hosted a conference in Brussels on unaccompanied children of third country origin in EU policy, under the auspices of the Swedish EU Presidency. Attended by ministry representatives from capitals across Europe, Elisabeth Dahlin, Secretary General of Save the Children Sweden stated "***The time has come for EU action***", noting that "***The EU has a clear and very necessary role in reducing the gap in protection for all unaccompanied and separated children***". As underlined by the Swedish Presidency at the conference, there appears to be strong support among Member States that the particular challenges presented by unaccompanied minors would indeed benefit from a comprehensive response at EU level, combining aspects of protection and prevention as well as appropriate solutions for the minors concerned taking into account the best interests of the child. The Spanish Government indicated clearly their support for the adoption of a concrete EU action plan in relation to all unaccompanied minors during their EU Presidency in the first half of 2010.

Human Rights Watch, the Separated Children in Europe Programme, UNICEF and UNHCR joined Save the Children in general recommendations on possible EU measures for such an action plan. The recommendations urge the EU to improve EU legislation on the protection and assistance of such children in the EU. They also suggest the creation of EU guidelines on a number of key issues. They propose EU cooperation on assessing the situation in countries of origin. The EU could also engage with countries of origin "*to ensure reintegration of children where appropriate and prevention of unsafe migration in the first place,*" as Dahlin noted.

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Attachments: joint recommendations for EU action and the presentation of Elisabeth Dahlin, Secretary General of Save the Children Sweden conference background paper, conference agenda.