

Significant gaps remain in the fight against sexual exploitation of children

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The launch of ECPAT International's Global Monitoring Report on the Status of Action against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (see www.ecpat.net) took place on 19 December with the participation of over sixty representatives from the media, NGOs and UN agencies.

ECPAT Executive Director, Carmen Madriñán introduced the reports, celebrating ten years of action since the Stockholm Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. She emphasized that the reports represent a long process of information collection and extensive interviews and assessment, conducted with partners in the countries examined. In her comments she stated that: "Whilst much has been achieved over the last few years in the fight against CSEC, the reports clearly illustrate that significant gaps remain and that the changing nature of the problem is highlighting a deep and widespread demand for sex with children".

Ms. Madrinan's introductory remarks emphasized that a large number of countries around the world remain on the periphery of global efforts to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children, as they lack articulated plans and show up as having a series of isolated and punctuated initiatives. However, she also noted that many new countries in the Pacific and CIS regions, for example, are taking important first steps to address this problem.

Keynote speaker Prof. Jaap Doek, the chair of the UN Committee for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, praised the efforts made by ECPAT in "the field of commercial sexual exploitation of children, being one of the international NGOs with national branches that have played and play an important role in the implementation of Children's Rights around the world in this particular area".

Prof. Doek's presentation focused on the Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Optional Protocol on Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Pornography (Optional Protocol), the latter which strengthens and increases the standards enshrined in the CRC, requiring separate ratification. Prof. Doek stressed the fact that "the Optional Protocol requires State Parties not only to include in the criminal law against child pornography and prostitution, the possibility of prosecuting individuals, but also to prosecute organizations". He stressed the need for each State Party to have laws that fully comply with the Optional Protocol and properly ratify and implement it. He noted that only a small number of countries have ratified and stated that we must ensure that all States ratify by January 2010. Another issue he touched upon, is extra-territorial law which he said requires special measures including training of law-enforcement professionals and strengthened international cooperation to permit full application. "When it comes to the protection of children victims of sexual exploitation there is often not enough specific protection of children in the criminal law procedures" said Prof. Doek. However, he emphasized that strong national laws and enforcement procedures were the first line of defense for children.