

**Statssekretær Henriette Westhrin**

**Conference on Children and Punishment  
Oslo, September 22, 2011 –opening speech  
(innlegg etter Astrid Aas – Hansen )**

Dear participants,

First of all, on behalf of the Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, we are proud to co- host such an important meeting. We are gathered here in Oslo to listen to and to discuss very important questions concerning children and families at risk.

I am very pleased to say that Russia and Norway now have a long history of close cooperation, aiming to improve living conditions of children and families at risk.

Approximately ten years ago we recognized common challenges in dealing successfully with some of the most marginalized groups of the child population. Since then we

have engaged in a bilateral long-term commitment to strengthen the rights of the child according to the UN CRC.

From our point of view, this has been a very useful and positive partnership, where trust, sharing and documented results have emerged. Special attention has been given to the child population living in the North. As neighbouring countries we share many of the same challenges such as: the migration of young people during or immediately after education, recruiting competent personnel in sparsely populated areas, and to secure the quality of services provided over huge distances.

Under the framework of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, The Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion in Norway and Russian federal and regional authorities have engaged in several bilateral agreements. We have launched project partnerships where exchange of information, experiences, competence and best-practice

have taken place. Furthermore, we have integrated universities into the partnerships, to document and conduct research on results from all the changes in practice that have taken place.

Some topics have been identified as particularly interesting for closer cooperation between our professionals; for instance:

- early intervention in families with small children in risk of developing serious behavioural problems
- reinforcing the parents' abilities to provide adequate care and attention to their own children under professional guidance
- systematic involvement of relatives and social network resources around families with children or young people having problems with social integration
- to empower the families to solve their own problems in a guided process,

- -and finally, to reduce the rates of children in conflict with the law through prevention programmes, alternative reactions to imprisonment of children and young people and effective rehabilitation programmes for those who already have received a verdict.

This will be further addressed by the Ministries (BLD) presentation later today.

As we have moved forward in this cooperation, we as partners have realized two things: First: we can not succeed in obtaining our common goals if we do not have a multi-agency approach involving different agencies working together. Secondly: we can not succeed if we don't anchor all project partnerships on all levels in our respective organizations. Thirdly: we need to build competence and practice that is documented by research results.

This realization has, in addition to several new multi-agency partnerships, led to this conference. Today there

are gathered high-level representatives from the European Council, different Ministries, ombudsmen, courts, police, child care services, researchers and others. We are gathered to obtain information about the status of the work being done in Russia and Norway on the topic of children in conflict with the law. Another objective is to clarify how we as partners can develop an even closer collaboration to achieve our goals more effectively for the best of the individual child.

Every girl and boy has the right to a future and to a development in accordance with his and her potential.

This is stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Today we can exchange and share knowledge and experience and give concrete meaning to our cooperation about children at risk and meet the recommendations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

I wish you all a successful conference and good luck in the continuation of this important work.