



Stockholm Declaration on Children and Residential Care

The second international conference on Children and Residential Care held in Stockholm 12 – 15 May, 2003, sponsored by the Swedish Foreign Ministry and the Swedish International Development and Co-operation Agency (Sida), has discussed the situation of children in long-term residential care. There is indisputable evidence that institutional care has negative consequences for both individual children and for society at large. These negative consequences could be prevented through the adoption of national strategies to support families and children, by exploring the benefits of various types of community-based care, by reducing the use of institutions, by setting standards for public care and for the monitoring of the remaining institutions.

The participants at the conference – more than 600 individuals from governments, civil society and the research community from 71 countries – have agreed on the following:

Principles

Governments that have ratified the CRC have certain binding obligations, including a direct primary responsibility for children deprived of family care. These obligations also extend to others in society whose actions can make a difference in the realisation of child rights. In the case of children deprived of family care, these obligations include:

- Preventing children from being deprived of family care in the first case by fighting discrimination and by supporting appropriate family services;
- Resorting to institutional care only as a last resort and as a temporary response;
- Developing, financing, implementing and monitoring alternative systems of care based on the principles of providing children with a family environment;
- Regulating and monitoring any remaining institutions for children in public care in line with agreed international and national standards and the CRC;
- In all actions reflect the voice of youth and secure participation from the children and families concerned.

Actions

In order to translate these principles into actions we urge governments to:

- Restructure the system of public care in order to diminish the use of institutions, develop alternative care approaches and strengthen effective community-based preventive and protective social services;
- Strengthen the legislative framework, in line with the CRC, to ensure that the rights of all children deprived of family care, including those in prison, are fulfilled;
- Fight discrimination that brings children into public care – including gender, disability, ethnicity and HIV status of children or their family members;
- Adopt standards for public care and develop good monitoring procedures;
- Reallocate funds to prioritise preventive and alternative care services.

We urge civil society to:

- Assist in the development of strategies to deinstitutionalise children and create alternatives;
- Promote the principle of non-discrimination, especially with regard to HIV-status, ethnicity and disability, among families, communities, care and service providers and governments;
- Mobilise communities to support families to prevent children from being deprived of family care;
- Push governments to fulfil their commitments under the CRC to children in public care;
- Transfer skills and experience to local partners and document and disseminate good practices;
- Create opportunities for child, youth and family participation in decision-making.

We urge the research community to:

- Assist in creating systems for documentation and monitoring of children in public care;
- Find a system of common indicators for child placements;
- Carry out long-term studies on the consequences of different forms of public care for children as well as their economic and social cost.

We urge national and international funding partners to:

- Allocate funds based on the principles and actions outlined in this document;
- Support the development of preventive initiatives and alternative care systems through the exchange of experience and through capacity building;
- Encourage close co-operation between governments and civil society in supporting children deprived of family care.

We urge practitioners to:

- Further develop community-based approaches and advocate for their implementation;
- Ensure that the approaches to children in public care are rights-based;
- Secure participation of children and families in programme design and in decisions that directly affect them.

We, the participants of the Stockholm Conference on Children and Residential Care, declare ourselves committed to work towards these principles and actions.

Stockholm, May 2003