

NEWS RELEASE

NGOs call for a Commissioner for Children's Rights

Contacts: Olivia Lind, Save the Children +32 (0)478 209 341

Jane Backhurst, World Vision +32 (0)477 438 166

Jana Hainsworth, Eurochild +32 (0)476 36 49 36

Brussels-based NGOs¹ called for the EU to appoint a Commissioner for Children's Rights, while welcoming today's launch of the European Commission's first-ever strategy paper, "Towards an EU strategy on the Rights of the Child".

"The European Commission now has a unique opportunity to make sure children's rights are given the priority they deserve in all areas of its work and to turn policies into reality for children in Europe and elsewhere in the world. This Communication is a really positive development" said Jane Backhurst from World Vision.

On the international stage, just over a year ago, thousands of European citizens joined the campaign to Make Poverty History. They were demonstrating their concern for their governments and the EU to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. Although governments appeared to respond to that challenge, action has not matched the rhetoric. Millions of children across the world still remain in severe poverty. When disaster strikes, children are often most vulnerable or even targeted. It is then that children's voices really need to be listened to in order for them to be protected.

"Now, more than ever is the time to invest in children's rights," said Britta Öström from Save the Children. "Within the EU itself many issues have not been dealt with adequately, such as, European legislation on separated asylum-seeking and migrant children which falls below international standards. Also, measures to protect all children from abuse need to be standardised across Europe and member states need to make good their commitments to eradicating child poverty."²

The only way the European Commission will be able to form a coherent strategy to respond to all the issues related to children's rights, is to dedicate this task to one of the new Commissioner posts. These new posts will be created when Romania and Bulgaria join the EU. This would not only be a visible demonstration of Europe's commitment to the rights of children everywhere, but would also provide a focal point for children to communicate with.

"Children are not only the future, but they are the drivers of real and lasting change in our society today. They need someone at European level who will take their opinions seriously. That person should be a dedicated Commissioner for Children's Rights." said Jane Backhurst.

But if the Commission is to ensure the best response possible to promoting and protecting children's rights, it must also ensure that children are truly able to participate in the decisions that concern them. That means making their voices heard at EU level and incorporating their opinions into future policy and action.

"We need more than tokenism – child participation in all policy areas is crucial. What's more, it has been shown to bring real value added on numerous occasions" said Britta Öström.

The new EU Strategy is an excellent first step but if EU policy is really to be in the best interests of children, then the EU must dedicate the time, resources and commitment necessary.

¹ **This press release has been endorsed by the following organizations: Save the Children, World Vision, Plan International, SOS-Kinderdorf International, The European Children's Network, Eurochild AISBL, European Foundation for Street Children Worldwide**

² Heads of State made this commitment in March 2006 Council Conclusions under point 72