STATEMENT REGARDING THE SELECTION PROCESS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN THE EUROPEAN FORUM

The Brussels-based NGO Action Group, working on the implementation of the EC Communication ‘Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child’¹ is considerably concerned by the manner in which civil society has been invited to participate in the European Forum being held on 4 June in Berlin, and by the fact that it has been suggested that we should ourselves organise civil society’s future participation in the Forum.

In our opinion, the current list of invited participants does not reflect a transparent or fair selection process, based on shared and agreed criteria. However, a transparent selection process is fundamental to the consultation of any group of stakeholders, particularly when the number of participants at such gatherings is, and will be, extremely limited.

Furthermore, we are concerned that civil society appears to be expected by the Commission to auto-select the ten representatives that will able to attend future European Fora. We refer in particular to the following paragraph in the official invitation to the 4 June European Forum:

We strongly support the participation of civil society in such an arena. Ten permanent seats are reserved for NGOs in the Forum. We leave you the discretion of choosing your own representatives, at the occasion of this first meeting.

It would be impossible to select 10 organisations at the first Forum that could represent the breadth and depth of civil society organisations (CSOs) working on children’s rights in Europe, let alone in third countries as well. This is quite apart from the fact that the limited timeframe precludes any form of meaningful discussion between CSOs.

Looking to the future, we strongly oppose the idea that the 10 permanent CSO participants in the European Forum should be chosen by civil society itself. This should be the responsibility of the Commission or a body it nominates which is impartial.

Indeed, we would question whether 10 organisations could ever claim to represent the whole of civil society globally. In our view, therefore, the number of civil society participants in the European Forum must be raised. This would also serve to balance better the representation of other institutions and stakeholders.

We therefore propose that the European Commission should set up a reference list of CSOs from both European and non-European countries, which would remain permanently open so that new organisations could be added. A list of criteria should also be established on the basis of which CSOs would be chosen to participate in the Fora, and these criteria should be publicly available on the Commission’s website. The CSOs on the Commission’s list should be contacted in order that they may apply to participate in the Forum. We also believe that additional specialist organisations should be invited to the Forum, depending on the topics being addressed.

The NGO Action Group on the EU’s Child Rights Strategy, 4 June 2007

¹ Brussels, 4.7.2006 COM(2006) 367 final