

# 24 hours for the children of incarcerated parents

Vindinghoved, Denmark, May 30-31, 2011

## SUMMARY

Representatives of nine organisations – the Danish National Council for Children, The Children’s Ombudsman (Norway), The Children’s Ombudsman (Sweden), RiksBryggan (an association for the families of incarcerated persons Sweden), The Association for the Families of Incarcerated Persons (Norway), The Danish Institute for Human Rights, SAVN (an association for the families of incarcerated persons Denmark), The Swedish Prison and Probation Service and the Danish Prison and Probation Service – convened for twenty-four hours in Denmark with the aim of exchanging knowledge and enhancing mutual inspiration across national boundaries.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child proceeds fundamentally from the principles that:

- the child has the right to a family life and, as far as possible, to know and be cared for by his or her parents
- the child has the right to freedom of expression and is entitled to be heard in matters affecting his or her own life<sup>1</sup>

These principles apply equally to children from families in which one or both parents are incarcerated. Such children comprise a highly vulnerable group whose lives may be extremely complicated and who will often encounter problems of a particularly acute nature.

The vulnerability of such children raises a number of significant issues and renders imperative serious considerations as to the welfare of the child.

For this reason, specific structures and means must be devised in order that the rights of such children may be upheld.

**The organisations present discussed a number of measures we believe ought to be held in keen consideration at all stages, from a parent being arrested, remanded in custody and sentenced, through terms of incarceration to eventual release:**

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<sup>1</sup> The Preamble of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Articles 2, 7, 9, 12, 13.

- A permanent children's ombudsman/officers with special responsibility for children's welfare should be a feature of all correctional service agencies.
- Where relevant, new initiatives should be systematically evaluated, such evaluation taking into consideration the views of the children involved.
- Focus should be applied to structuring modes of collaboration and establishing clear divisions of responsibility between involved authorities, e.g. correctional services, police and social authorities.
- Focus should be applied to strengthening and/or facilitating the parenting role of incarcerated parents where this is deemed to be in the best interests of the child.
- Focus should be applied to on-going dialogue between authorities, institutions and organisations.
- Efforts should be made to standardise national minimum rules for visiting and communication between incarcerated parents and their children, as well as to highlight such rules as apply to children and other visitors inside the individual institution.
- The perspective of the child must be brought to bear at all times, and the welfare of the child must remain in constant focus.

The Danish National Council for Children proposes moreover that permanent collaboration be established between the Nordic countries within this area, and that such initiative be outlined to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Day of General Discussion, 30 September 2011: "Children of incarcerated parents".

At the meeting's conclusion, the Norwegian Association for the Families of Incarcerated Persons, **Foreningen for Fangers Pårørende**, undertook to host a new Nordic meeting at a mutually convenient future time.

The Danish National Council for Children  
/sgh

28 June 2011