

## **Expert Meeting “Consolidating the Evidence Base of Children Born of War”**

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December 7-8, 2006 an international expert meeting was held at the Zentralarchiv. The objective of this meeting, which took place in cooperation with the “War and Children Identity Project” (WCIP) in Bergen, Norway, was to gather scientists and practitioners from different disciplines and countries working on the topic of children born of war or closely related areas. Children born of war are children who are born by women who had a relationship with enemy, allied or peacekeeping soldiers or children born as a result of politicised violence/rape used as sexualised war strategy.

Participants came from Norway, Denmark, Germany, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Uganda and USA. The meeting focused on three main areas: 1. The presentation of evidence on children born of war from past and present conflicts 2. Personal and legal interests of children born of war and 3. Defining the research agenda for future international and interdisciplinary collaboration.

With regard to the question of evidence, research results from Norway and Denmark were presented and discussed. Children born of war in Norway and Denmark were fathered by German soldiers and local women during the occupation in WWII. The life chances of these children were analysed in a questionnaire survey with more than 600 respondents. The preliminary results indicate these children were stigmatised in the post-war period and discriminated by the community and society, although clear differences exist between Norway and Denmark. In contrast to the quite well documented results on the children in Denmark and Norway a big gap exists with regard to information from other European territories occupied by the Germans during WWII. Some evidence is available from the Netherlands and France, but particularly from the eastern territories information is missing. Also the life of children fathered by allied forces such as US and Canadian troops in the aftermath of WWII was discussed.

Turning to evidence from present conflicts the rights and problems of children born out of rapes used as military strategy such as in Bosnia were presented. Also the

special situation of female child soldiers in Uganda who were abducted and forced to serve with the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) was elaborated. Many of the soldiers gave birth while serving with the rebel group, and about 1000 babies are expected to have been born. These children are mostly a result of sex slavery or rape. Both, mother and children are often not accepted back into their home community after having been released from the rebel group.

On the second day, the meeting focused on the personal and legal interests of children born of war. One presentation gave examples on the cumbersome road of tracing and contacting family members of children born of war. The importance of information and documentation and the correctness of these in order to trace family members was clearly emphasised. The significance of information, particularly, with regard to finding the father later in life was demonstrated in a presentation discussing whether paternity is a private or public matter using the Danish case as an example. Of special interest in the discussion on legal rights of children born of war was the impact the "Draft United Nations policy statement and draft United Nations comprehensive strategy on assistance and support to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff or related personnel" issued June 5, 2006, could have on children born of war in general. This draft recognises the children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff or related personnel as an own category. Finally, the agenda for the child rights network was presented and served as starting point for many issues addressed in the closing debate.

Among the question discussed were: Who is responsible for establishing documentation and registering children and biological parents? What information should such a registry contain? When shall a child have the right to access this information? How to collect data without increasing stigmatisation or risk of the child? How to collect data in conflict areas? How are children born of war stigmatised and discriminated and how to prove these children need special protection? How important is the identity question? What are the different categories of children born of war? These and many other issues were addressed which need further research and collaboration and some future steps were agreed on in order to improve the evidence base on children born of war. It was emphasised that a more systematic compilation and exchange of knowledge acquired so far might facilitate finding a common denominator for dealing with children born of war. This might also be helpful both at the scientific and political level in order to help children born of war in future wars and conflicts.

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