

Your Majesty, Vice Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen,

Your kind attendance to this event is a great honor to us. We are today celebrating the presentation of the outcome of the Child-friendly Project 2014. We will hear more about that from professor Said Mahmoudi later. Before that we look forward to an informative and inspiring lecture by Professor Kirsten Sandberg on “Current issues of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child”. Professor Sandberg is a member and former chairperson of the CRC.

I have the honor of chairing the board of the Stockholm Centre for the Rights of the Child at the Department of Law at Stockholm University. It is Sweden’s largest law department with approximately 500 students and fifty active doctoral students, many lecturers and professors. This of course offers unique opportunities to achieve high-level research.

I, myself, took my law degree at the university of Stockholm, almost forty years ago! Much has happened since then. This includes the then virtually unknown field of Child law.

The Stockholm Centre for the Rights of the Child was created in 2012 and instituted by decision of the Vice Chancellor of the Stockholm University the same year. The Center is successfully run by Professor Wiweka Warnling Nerep and Juris Doctor Pernilla Leviner. A lot has been achieved, despite the relatively short time in which the Center has been active.

The Center is the first Child law research center in Sweden, The overarching purpose of the Center is to create a national unifying research platform for Child law research, with the intention to become an international leader in this area. These activities include the establishment and development of Child law and the development of international and interdisciplinary work in co-operation with others.

The work of the Center focuses on creating a good research environment for researchers involved in Child law fields and initiating co-operations between researchers in other disciplines, including areas of fields outside the law. The Center co-operates closely with organizations and authorities with responsibilities in areas of Child law.

The research, as well as research-related activities and education, involves a large number of legal fields and many

different topics. Those include areas such as the best interest of the child in custody cases, children's rights in schools, violations of dignity from a child's perspective, youth offenders, parental penal responsibility as guardians of children, disabled children as victims of crime, children in migration processes, a child's right to participate in child protection matters, and specialized children's courts as well as the role of the courts in child protection matters, co-operation and confidentiality in child custody issues, youths and Internet hate crimes, the treatment of children with neuropsychiatric disabilities and juvenile offenders in the legal system.

Several of these projects have interdisciplinary connections and are conducted in collaboration with other institutions at Stockholm University, among others the Department of Child and Youth Studies, the Department of Psychology, the Department for Social Work as well as the Department of Sociology. The Center also works with other universities in Sweden and internationally. In doing so we hope to create the premises for academic discussions concerning Child law issues and to create a network of researchers and practitioners with an interest in Child law topics from different fields.

An important event establishing the Stockholm Centre for the Rights of the Child as an internationally important player was the large international child law conference, Child-Friendly Justice, which the Center arranged in May 2014. The goal of that conference was to highlight and discuss the significance of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in creating legal procedures more adjusted to children and their rights. An anthology covering this event will be the first in a series of Child rights-oriented volumes. The Center has also published a nationally-oriented anthology on Child law topics. The plan is to publish such work on a continuing basis.

The protection of the child is facing many and different challenges in which the Center has an important role to play.

There are certain issues I would like to address.

Lack of accountability is a constant issue. Accountability is a cornerstone in a society built on the rule of law. But to a certain extent that aspect is often neglected. This is particularly relevant when it comes to children. A very

important field for the Center is the legal research dealing with violence and other harmful acts against children and the responsibility of the authorities in such cases.

Another challenge of great importance is the serious violations of integrity and privacy on the Internet. This is especially alarming when it comes to children. The difficulty to tilt the balance between free speech on the one hand and protection of the integrity of the child on the other, is sensitive and very difficult to strike properly. The power of new technologies and the difficulty for the legislator and the police are obvious. In the light hereof, the research of the Center focused on privacy crimes from a child's perspective and tort law issues tied to violations of integrity and privacy on the Internet is most important.

Another serious challenge is the unbelievable, disgusting sexual abuses and the child slavery that seem to go on. The Center is running projects concerning for example parental criminal liability as custodians of a child and the rights and criminal liability of care providers.

The Center has an important role to play in the legislative process by way of commenting on law proposals. Representatives from the Center also participate in drafting a report, on behalf of Unicef, on the legal situation of children who are EU citizens without a residential permit in Sweden. The report will also deal with the rights of children to protection from violence and assaults. This work is very important since we probably will be seeing increasing numbers of begging migrants – with babies – in our streets.

When there are 60 million refugees in the world of which 30 million are children – the need for children protection is essential. And this protection needs to be given by law. Despite the fact that Sweden has a comparatively civilized migrant process, I am very glad that the Center also focuses on the best interest of a child in migration processes. There are many things to be done.

The 30 million children fleeing from war and atrocities or deep poverty are the future of our society. You do not need any extended imagination to realize the dangerous impact for the future, of the fear, the poverty, the diseases, the hate, the discrimination, the sex exploitation, the abuses and the

unbelievable atrocities experienced by far too many of these children. We all have a responsibility to protect them even if that means a reduction of our welfare. This includes that every individual should speak up in order to uphold the rule of law and human rights. It is even more important in times such as those we live in today. Our democratic society has not, like in the dark 30s – successfully been able to protect those who need our protection the most.

To conclude.

On a very personal note, I am deeply concerned over what I currently see and hear in Europe and in our own country, Sweden. Thousands of children and their parents die in the Mediterranean or in overloaded trucks on their way to asylum. Europe closes its borders, and Swedish politicians, editors and voters discuss children and their parents not as human beings, but as volumes.

In Hungary, the government has spent 100 million Euros to build a four meter razor wired fence and launching an anti-migrant billboard campaign aimed at dissuading people from entering the country. Migrants, including children, are tear-gassed when fleeing. This is extremely worrying.

It is only one year ago that the party leader of the growing populist party the Sweden Democrats in the Swedish Parliament expressed his view on children's rights, by referring to the day in which paperless refugee children became entitled to health and hospital care – as the day of shame.

In this environment the work of the Stockholm Centre for the Rights of the Child is essential. It brings knowledge to the public and to the politicians. It is our task to make them all listen. In this pursuit a good strategy involves the education of the youth.

Thank you for listening!