

Brussels, 25 May 2009

25 May 2009 - International Missing Children's Day - a message of hope and solidarity

The European Commission is supporting International Missing Children's Day on 25 May. The main purpose of this day is to encourage European citizens and the whole world not to forget all the children who are missing. It sends an international message of hope and solidarity to parents who have no news of their children. Mr Barrot, Commission Vice-President, today took part in launching a high-profile publicity campaign for the 116 000 hotline promoted by Missing Children Europe, a European federation which represents 23 NGOs active in 16 Member States in the fight against the disappearance and sexual exploitation of children.

On International Missing Children's Day, organised by Missing Children Europe, Mr Barrot took part in launching a high-profile publicity campaign for the 116 000 hotline. He expressed the Commission's encouragement for the initiative and its willingness to continue working closely with associations active in the field of protecting children's rights. He expressed his personal commitment to encouraging the adoption in each Member State of an "abduction alert" type of system, which could save lives. He regretted that the 116 000 hotline to social support services for missing children and their families was only operational in five Member States and found the delay difficult to explain. In his view, it showed the importance of resolute action to ensure that the EU's instruments produced practical results on the ground.

On the same occasion, the President of Missing Children Europe, Sir Francis Jacobs, said: "While establishing one and the same telephone number for missing children across the EU sounded quite ambitious and farfetched at first, it is now becoming a tangible reality. With the launch of the campaign in 10 EU Member States, we look forward to reaching out to many children and parents across the EU, through the immediate support granted by our member organizations operating a 116 000 hotline at national level. Every member of society is encouraged to call the number immediately if they know or even suspect that a child is missing or abducted."

To show solidarity with all parents and missing children, Mr Barrot asked European Commission staff to express their support for families affected by a disappearance by wearing a forget-me-not: missing children must not be forgotten.

Background

116 000

A Commission Decision of 2007 requires the EU countries to make the number available but does not require them to assign it to a service provider or operate these services. This calls for a firm commitment on the part of the national authorities. The Commission has repeatedly urged the Member States to make this number operational as soon as possible. So far this has been the case in five Member States: Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Portugal and Romania.

As of today, 25 May 2009 - according to information received by the national organisations concerned - the number is also operational in France, Belgium, Poland, Italy and Slovakia. This headway is undoubtedly due to the awareness-raising campaign conducted throughout 2008 as part of a Commission-funded project under the Daphne III Programme which was designed to encourage the EU countries where the number is not yet in use to assign and operate the 116 000 hotline.

"Child abduction alert" system

The Commission has adopted a working paper on best practices for launching a cross-border child abduction alert, which was welcomed by the JHA Council on 27 and 28 November 2008. It has published a call for proposals totalling €1 million as support for the Member States that have not yet adopted a "Child Alert" type of system.

Combating trafficking in human beings and the sexual exploitation of children and child pornography

In March this year the Commission adopted two proposals containing new rules to step up the fight against trafficking in human beings, the sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. These new proposals will guarantee greater assistance for victims and harsher measures against the criminals responsible for the sexual exploitation of children and trafficking.