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Joint Statement on the Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November 2026)

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"Ethical media reporting on sexual violence against children"

November 18 marks the Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, a vital moment to pay tribute to all children who have been victims of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation and to acknowledge the profound and lasting impact of these violations on their lives. Their experiences underscore the need to ensure effective protection, access to justice and appropriate support services for every child.

The 2026 edition aims at focusing on "Ethical media reporting on sexual violence against children", drawing attention to the crucial role of the media in raising awareness of sexual violence against children while safeguarding their rights, dignity and privacy.

The way in which sexual violence against children is reported matters. The same story can protect or harm, depending on the choices made in the newsroom. A headline, a photograph or an interview can increase public understanding, help break the silence and encourage victims to seek support. Conversely, inappropriate reporting can expose children to further harm, compromise their identity and privacy, reinforce stereotypes or contribute to victim-blaming. Ethical media reporting must therefore place the rights, dignity and best interests of the child at its heart, ensuring that public awareness is promoted without compromising the protection and well-being of child victims. In addition, reporting on cases of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse against children requires caution, to ensure that the privacy is guaranteed, so that no details are disclosed that could in any way lead to the identification of the victim.

The "Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse" is clear on this point. It calls upon States to encourage the media to provide appropriate information on all aspects of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, with due respect for media independence and freedom of the press. At the same time, it requires them to prevent the public dissemination of any information that could lead to the identification of a victim. These two commitments must be undertaken with the understanding that one depends on the other, and vice versa.

Such measures call for a careful balance. The right to respect for private and family life and freedom of expression, protected respectively by Articles 8 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, are both at stake. A free and independent press is essential to democratic societies and to the public's right to be informed, and it is precisely in this spirit that ethical reporting must be promoted: through dialogue and shared professional standards, alongside appropriate legislative or self-regulatory safeguards.

It is in this spirit that we welcome the launch of "Ethical Reporting on Sexual Violence against Children: A Journalism Handbook", a comprehensive tool which is intended to complement and reinforce national codes of ethics. Based on ten principles for ethical reporting, the Handbook places children's rights at its centre and promotes journalism that informs without exposing children to further harm, while balancing child protection with the public's right to information.

The Handbook sets out good practices for conducting ethical interviews, and for using language, headlines and audiovisual material in ways that avoid stereotypes, victim-blaming and sensationalism, and that do not expose a child's identity. It is complemented by practical resources, such as key definitions, information on specialist organisations and official data sources, as well as pre-publication checklists.

The Handbook belongs to a wider body of Council of Europe standards that we invite States to take into consideration. We therefore call upon States to give due attention to the Handbook, and to encourage national authorities to engage with regulatory bodies, civil society, journalists and other media actors to translate it, adapt it to their national context and promote its use.

In line with the Lanzarote Committee's implementation report "Protecting children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust: Legal Frameworks", we also call upon States that have not already done so to adopt legislative or other measures to prevent the public dissemination, notably by the media, of any information that could identify a child victim.

Although addressed primarily to journalists and other media actors, the Handbook can also serve other professionals, such as policy makers and professionals in contact with children, who wish to raise awareness or report cases of sexual violence against children from a child-rights perspective.

Protecting children and safeguarding a free and independent press are not competing goals. Accurate, respectful and trauma-informed reporting serves both: it informs the public, enables victims to be heard while protecting their dignity and preserving their anonymity, and contributes to a culture of respect for children's rights on which prevention depends.

Behind every report there is a human experience, and a child whose life has already been profoundly affected. Our responsibility is to ensure that relating that experience does not become another source of harm, but instead contributes to greater understanding, stronger protection and a future in which every child can live free from violence.