

**International Conference on Child Rights**

*Bucharest, 2-4 February 2006*

Opening statement

Mr. Gheorghe Barbu, Romanian Minister of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and honour to welcome you to this important event organised under the auspices of the Romanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and within the framework of the Phare 2002 Programme, implemented by the National Authority for the Protection of Child Rights.

I would like to thank the officials and experts who have accepted our invitation and to express my confidence that the exchange of ideas and best practices will support our countries in the shared effort towards progress in this area.

Please allow me to welcome the presence to this reunion of President Traian Basescu, Baroness Emma Nicholson, Member of the European Parliament, Mrs. Maud de Boer, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

I grant special attention to European initiatives to strengthen the capacity of our countries to take the necessary steps from commitment to firm and constant action, in order to promote and protect the rights of the child.

The protection of child rights represents one of the priorities of our Ministry, as well as a priority of the government programme of the current Cabinet. In the Government Programme 2005-2008 the activity of the Government in this area has as major objective the construction of an effective and diverse system of services and allowances connected to the reality of the Romanian society, aiming to ensure the unselective application of the principles contained in the Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Child for all children in Romania.

The protection of the child within his or her family is the guiding principle founding all the actions that we have undertaken since the beginning of our mandate.

The pursuit of decentralisation in the social welfare system from the county level to the local level has created the necessary framework for a quicker and more effective intervention from the local authorities for the support of families and children. The decentralisation will also be accompanied by ensuring the necessary financial resources, not only for the provision of financial benefits foreseen by the law but also and especially for building the capacity of the social assistance services at local level. We will focus simultaneously both on rendering the local authorities responsible for the efficient use of existing resources, as well as on attracting new financial sources.

Another line of action within our work is the attempt to further diversify the types of social benefits provided to families with children. In addition to the state allowance for children, the complementary allowance for the single-parent family, the complementary allowance for the families with many children, the sustenance allowance for the single-parent family and the allowance for newborns, a regulation has been adopted last year for supporting the family in view of raising their child.

If from the point of view of financial benefits we can speak about their diversification, we cannot say the same for social services. At this time, the social services at local level are insufficiently developed, and our efforts will be focused on this issue in the following period.

It is self evident that we need a quick development of social services at local level (day-care centres, counselling centres, support centres for parents), this being also an essential premise for the achievement of some goals, such as stimulating the growth of the birth rate, the increase the participation of women on the labour market and the reconciliation of family life and professional life.

Thus, we are envisaging the development of day-care services for all children, whether their families are at risk or not. Up to now, our attention has been

focused on the families at risk, but I consider the time has come to intensify our efforts in order to respond to the needs of all families.

The central and local authorities, as well as the civil society will be called upon to be involved in this endeavour, in order to identify the best legal framework for the establishment, functioning and organisation of day-care services.

Social services, as well as the financial benefits provided will be closely monitored, in order to make sure that the minimum quality standards are upheld and that the financial resources are efficiently used, considering the needs of families, as well as their capacity to overcome the crisis situations and to regain their autonomy.

To conclude I would like to point out that another important issue, maybe the key to sustainable development of these services is the cooperation at local level between social assistance services, education services and health services. The collaboration of these services is paramount both for strengthening the capacity of families to face the various challenges facing them, as well as for the early prevention of situations which may lead to separate the child from his or her parents, or for providing the necessary support for the reintegration of the child in his or her family after a period of separation from the parents.

I express my confidence in the positive impact of this conference on identifying optimal means for alternative care for children. I wish the best to all participants and pleasant stay in Bucharest!