



- the spoken word -

Welcoming Speech

on the occasion of

**Expert Meeting
of the**

**Centre of Excellence for Child Protection in Medicine
- Baden-Wurtemberg -**

**Johannes-Wilhelm Rörig,
Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues**

**Berlin,
Kaiserin Friedrich Stiftung,
29 September 2016**



**Dear Professor Fegert,
Dear Professor Finkelhor,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to all of you and I am very happy that we have come together for this important expert symposium. I would like to thank Professor Fegert and all responsible colleagues of the University of Ulm. I am extremely grateful to you for taking up the important issue of “Sexual Abuse by Juveniles” and making today’s conference possible at such short notice. In addition I am delighted that you, David Finkelhor, are here.

Dear David Finkelhor,

It is my great pleasure to meet you for the second time. The first time we met each other was in December 2014 on the occasion of our international “Expert Meeting on Prevalence of Sexual Abuse”. The results of this congress were published in February 2016 by Professor Fegert in the expert report of the same name. In approximately two months’ time, we will be seeing each other here in Berlin again. On 29th November at the invitation of Federal Minister Professor Wanka, you will be giving the keynote-presentation at the launch of the new funding lines at the conference “Protection, Prevention, Therapy – Research into sexualized Abuse”.

I am delighted to be able to report to you on two milestones from our work in Germany. Firstly, on our new initiative “Schools against Sexual Abuse”. Only a small number of schools in Germany have prevention concepts against sexual abuse. We are working together with the 16 Ministers of Education of the German federal states. I would like to get all the heads of schools and their teams on board. They need to be aware that child protection and education go hand in hand. Children who suffer sexual abuse are at a high risk of failing at school and active child protection has to be intensified. Only in schools do we have the chance to reach all girls and boys. Schools should not be places of abuse, but they should be places of protection and help. We have just launched our new initiative “Schools against Sexual Abuse”. Starting this month we will provide all 30,000 schools in Germany with a tool kit, helping them to develop their own prevention concepts.

This year we have also established the “Independent Commission to Investigate Child Sexual Abuse”. It was a long political struggle, but I am very happy to have appointed the seven members of the Commission on a resolution of the German parliament, supported by the German government.



The Commission will empower victims and survivors and contemporary witnesses to speak out and acknowledge victims and survivors as people whose experiences deserve recognition, shed light on abuse in institutions and make recommendations on both better safeguarding of minors and institutional inquiry. The Commission is the first worldwide which will investigate abuse not only in institutions but also in family settings. I hope the inquiry panel will provide us with a more critical eye for ongoing risks and new challenges.

“Sexual Abuse by Juveniles” is the subject of this meeting.

This form of violence has to be taken much more seriously in Germany in the future. Perhaps some of you can remember that the German Youth Institute (DJI) published an important expert report in 2011 entitled “Sexualized Abuse against Children in Institutions”.

Since then at the latest, it was no longer possible to deny that sexual abuse within institutions is more likely to be committed by juveniles than adults. A juvenile is more likely to be the victim of sexual abuse carried out by another juvenile than by an adult in employment there. In future, more attention needs to be paid to sexual abuse by juveniles. Prevention concepts need to focus on the prevention of sexual assaults by peer groups. Prevention and protection measures have to find answers to this.

But we have to differentiate between juveniles who sexually assault other juveniles and juveniles who abuse children. In order to avoid misunderstandings: Not every sexual act by juveniles constitutes sexual abuse. Sexuality between juveniles by mutual consent is obvious and natural. It is not a taboo, it is important for personality development and psycho-sexual development. However: Aspects of individual power differences can lead to sexuality between juveniles crossing the borderline to sexual abuse. I am referring to the application of coercion or force, physical violence and peer group pressure.

The specific technical challenge is to ensure there is a clear differentiation between consensual sexuality and sexual abuse.

Where sexual acts between juveniles and children occur, the case by contrast is clear: Sexuality has no place in this relationship. Every sexual act in this context is sexual abuse and inflicts serious harm on children. The question of consent of a child of course does not apply.



Sexual abuse by juveniles has many manifestations and all of them demand specific reactions. Furthermore, there must be realisation that many cases of sexual abuse by juveniles lie well outside the limits of criminal liability, it is not always possible to speak of “abnormality”.

In reality it is often a question of harassment, of contemptuous behaviour towards girls and women or an affectation of dominance using sexualized methods. This is totally unacceptable and humiliating towards the victims involved, as it violates their boundaries, their sense of shame. However, it is not pathological.

Much of what juveniles inflict on others requires an educational response, for example: pedagogic concepts, such as those currently being discussed in youth association work. Together with the “German Federal Youth Council”, we are currently working on questions relating to sexual abuse amongst juveniles. Tackling this subject with the “organized youth” is one of my key objectives. Youth associations are important places for juveniles, where they can develop a positive relationship to self-determined sexuality. This also means recognising boundaries and abusive acts and together with peers, developing, trying out and agreeing preventive and counter measures. I am delighted that the “German Federal Youth Council” is also taking part in today’s event.

I wish us all an informative symposium followed by lively discussions.

Thank you very much for your attention.
