

Remarks of the Consul General of Estonia Eva-Maria Liimets at the IFFD Award ceremony

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Estonia I would like to thank the International Federation for Family Development for this Award.

Supporting the well-being of children and families has been one of the central tenets of the Estonian Government for many years. There is a growing understanding in Estonia, that none of the other main goals of a state, like economic growth, can be achieved, if the state does not invest in families and guaranteeing every child's right to live in a safe environment, get high quality health care, obtain a good education and live out of poverty. Support for children and families constitutes an investment into the future of the whole of society.

After regaining independence so recently, in 1991, Estonia has had to rapidly carry out many substantial reforms. It has been a huge challenge, but at the same time, we have had the opportunity to base our development on the best practices of other countries - learning and implementing what has already proven effective. Estonia strongly supports basing policy decisions on solid evidence and implementing evidence-based programs.

Even though most of the work still lies ahead of us, the IFFD prize is a great honor for Estonia. It shows that we are on the right path, and it gives much encouragement to move on towards ever higher goals.

We have created a justice system, where each new legal amendment needs to be backed up by an impact analysis, including on the demographic situation and the welfare of families. Families are protected under the country's constitution. The Child Protection Law requires all public and private persons to hear the opinion of the child and to take into consideration the child's best interest, when making decisions that affect children. Even though any mistreatment of children has always been illegal, by adopting the new law, Estonia followed the example of many other countries by explicitly banning the corporal punishment of children.

Family policies have been designed with the goal of guaranteeing that having a child does not endanger a family's financial situation, and that all parents would have good opportunities for reconciling work and family life. For example, together the maternity benefit and the parental benefit are paid for a period of 575 days in Estonia.

Estonia is a small country, with a population of only 1.3 million people that, similarly to other European countries, faces the challenge of population decline. This is only one of the many reasons, why investing in children and family's needs to remain as one of the very central goals of our country.
