



## Mother Center Conference *How do we want to raise our Children?*

### International Mother Center Policy Paper and Platform of Action

#### **I. We are mothers, we are competent, we have joined forces for a better future for ourselves, our families and our children**

We are women from Mother Centers, Mother Center Initiatives and other Grassroots Community Groups. We are from 22 countries. In total at least 45.872 women, men and children participate actively in our groups.

We have come together from November 17-20, 2006 in Bratislava, Slovakia, to discuss the issue: How do we want to raise our children?

We have been engaged in a year long campaign on the local level to discuss the issues of child-raising as they present themselves in our daily lives. We have gathered a wealth of hands-on practical knowledge from the bottom up, which needs to be entered into public debate and decision making.

30 000 women, men and children from over 75 local groups, Mother Centers and Mother Center networks world-wide participated in our campaign. What connects us is our concern for the well-being of our children. We represent parents' voices from Argentina, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Burundi, Canada, Cameroon, Czech Republic, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Hungary, Italy, Jamaica, Kenya, Poland, Russia, Slovak Republic, The Netherlands, Trinidad, Turkey, Uganda and USA. Together we represent more than 348.353 families.

We mothers of all ages from nine to ninety, feel responsibility for our future as well as for the future of our children. We are often facing social isolation, lack of appreciation of our work, marginalisation and poverty. We share common problems, values, aims and we have similar strategies. In all our difference we all derive our values on a personal level from a deep sense of spirituality.

We are dealing with the task of parenting under conditions of isolation, devaluation, poverty, high levels of crime and substance abuse in the community, family violence and the sexual abuse and prostitution of young children. We are struggling to provide basic needs like a safe place to live, uncontaminated food, water, sanitation and clean air. We are taking care of children of all ages, of abandoned children, of AIDS-orphans. We are taking care of the sick and the old. Our centers are public living rooms for all generations.

We deal with our own problems, we are capable of designing feasible solutions and we have the support of each other. We also want to co-operate with and we seek support of other members of society.



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## **II. Mother Centers are a UN accredited Best Practice to promote healthy families and communities. Mother Centers and their networks need political and financial support.**

Mother Centers are being self-created all over the world by women who see the need of community support for the everyday task of raising children. Who see the need of recreating community and social cohesion where it has been destroyed by modernization, by migration, by wars, by totalitarianism and colonialism, by inner city violence, drugs and alcohol abuse, by natural disasters and by the HIV AIDS epidemic. Mother Centers are an answer to the weakening of social ties, family, kin and neighbourhood networks in the many different social, cultural and historic settings currently on our planet. They reinvent family and kinship under contemporary conditions. They are creating up to date support systems for child-raising in response to current historical conditions and demands. Mother Centers are paving ways for community parenting and social cohesion, for caring neighbourhoods and family friendly municipalities.

Mother Centers are a safe and caring space, where mothers of all ages can be supported and learn from other moms, a place of easy access, a home outside of home, a place to find community and support, a place of recognition and backing for parenting, a place for diversity and equality, a place that brings everything under one roof, implements a holistic and inclusive approach to families and communities and recreates neighbourhoods, a place to contribute talents and create family services, a place to generate civil society, to enter grassroots knowledge and resources into public life and public welfare, a place to share values and to realize dreams and visions.

Mother Centers provide many benefits to society including: quality improvement of family child rearing; promotion of tolerance and democratic skills; integration of socially weak families; support for better gender, family and neighbourhood relations; improvement of health for women and children; integration of migrants, ethnic minorities and Indigenous peoples; development of knowledge skills and knowledge reserves; support of compatibility of work and family; community building that includes youth; reverse of demographic trends; reform of institutions; improvement of the living environment (habitat); creation of humane forms of ageing; promotion of peace and international understanding.

World wide Mother Centers are struggling for sustainability. They cannot survive without access to public rent free space. They cannot survive without political support, and without core funding of the centers and their networks. Existing Mother Centers around the world face daily challenges: lack of public recognition; lack of funding; difficulty maintaining grassroots ownership and burnout. Mother Center initiatives around the world are struggling to access space and funds to get their Mother Centers going.

We have shared our stories and we have defined the support we need.



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### **III. We have a mission**

The Mother Center International Network (**mine**), its member networks, supporters and partners stand for a world that values and supports the work of mothers. We stand for a world that places social cohesion and community at the base of social and economic development. We stand for a world in which the culture of care is reintegrated into public life, we stand for caring community development. As mothers we see the need to invest in a ecological, economical and socially sustainable future.

### **IV. We see the need for the following policies and measures**

We want the wealthy so called “developed” countries to acknowledge and address poverty and racism in their own communities.

#### **We see the need for the following policies**

- ❖ Policies that support welcoming structures for children and families in public life
- ❖ Policies that support access to employment and income generation
- ❖ Policies that support the compatibility and balance of work and family
- ❖ Policies that calculate the value of unpaid care work and translate it into economic terms, revealing the enormous, currently invisible value of care work
- ❖ Policies that support and resource the care work of women
- ❖ Policies that recognize, support, preserve and make visible Indigenous culture and traditions through Indigenous participation and most importantly, the rights of Indigenous parents/families to raise their own child/children
- ❖ Policies that allow women and men to spend quality time with their children
- ❖ Policies that combat poverty of families and single parents
- ❖ Policies that acknowledge the expertise and competencies gained by everyday life and in informal learning settings
- ❖ Policies that legitimize parental organized child care
- ❖ Policies that support kindergartens and schools to cooperate with parents as equal partners
- ❖ Policies that include Mother Centers and other grassroots women’s groups as equal partners in local governance
- ❖ Policies that guarantee secure tenure and shelter for families
- ❖ Policies that secure access to safe water, air and sanitation
- ❖ Policies that secure family friendly services and family friendly urban and rural infrastructure
- ❖ Policies that support a healthy and sustainable natural environment
- ❖ Policies that support the equality of men and women
- ❖ Policies that ensure affordable quality childcare



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### **We see the need for the following measures**

- ❖ Legitimization of the informal learning that occurs already in the Mother Center setting
- ❖ Support for incorporation of complementary formal learning, resulting in certification of the practice expertise gained in the Mother Centers so that for instance teenage mothers can continue formal education
- ❖ Creation of a Global Fund for exchanges and peer learning between Mother Centers and other Grassroots Women's Groups world-wide
- ❖ Core Funding for existing Mother Centers and their Networks and creation of a global fund for the setting up of new Mother Centers and their participation in the Mother Centers networks
- ❖ Creation of a Global Fund for grassroots women's groups to have rent free access to, to own and to self manage their own public spaces
- ❖ International formation and adoption of a Caring Community Index
- ❖ Invest in women and children at the budgetary level by implementing a gender and family perspective in the use of public resources
- ❖ Tax redemption for the work of grassroots community groups
- ❖ Institute international support for two percent of taxes to fund NGOs
- ❖ Funding of impact studies of Mother Centers on children, families and society

### **V. We have collectively decided to engage in the following campaigns and actions**

- ❖ Continuation of the How do we want to raise our children campaign
- ❖ Mothers March on Mothers Day
- ❖ We want to work together on the creation of an Indigenous Mother's Network as part of the International Mother Centers Network

### **VI. We seek support and partnerships for these policies, measures and actions from all sectors of society**

#### **Media**

We are able to offer positive stories and deep insight into various topics.

We challenge the media to publish positive news.

We do not get enough attention from the media, as we do not stand for crime, sex and scandals.

We ask the media to partner with us in making public the positive solutions as well as the stories of community and solidarity being lived every day in our groups and centers.



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### **Local Authorities**

We are able to offer positive models of organizing and developing communities. We ask local authorities to treat us as equal partners in local governance. We are not sufficiently recognized by local authorities and municipal councils. We challenge local authorities to design and implement their family policies WITH families rather than FOR them. Partnership with local authorities, police, the judicial system and health workers has to begin with listening and proceed to mediation and finally facilitating collaboration.

### **Institutional Actors and Professionals**

We are skilled in raising our children and managing families, as well as organizations, in practical as well as methodological ways. We challenge professionals to redefine their role from being the ones teaching and defining expertise to the ones engaging in principled and equitable partnerships with Mother Centers and other grassroots women's groups. We are not sufficiently recognized by professionals and institutional actors. We ask professionals to partner with us to enhance the visibility, recognition and remuneration of grassroots women's expertise, and to be door openers for grassroots women's experts to engage on an equitable basis with mainstream institutions.

### **Private Sector**

We can offer skills, expertise, endurance and passion to do various jobs. We challenge the private sector to adapt corporate culture to the needs of caregivers. The work of mothers and caregivers is not sufficiently recognized by the corporate world and the social partners. We ask the private sector to support community work and grassroots initiatives in civil society.

Signed on the International Day of Children's Rights 2006, by:

Mother Center International Network for Empowerment (**mine**)

Union of Slovak Mother Centers



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