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# Inquiry on Child Abuse and Neglect in Institutions and Foster Homes

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## Press release

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Göran Johansson  
Inquiry Chair  
+46 8 405 41 06  
+46 70 594 56 24

Johanna Hedström  
Press contact:  
+46 8 405 38 93  
+46 70 665 37 36

### **“Neglect and abuse at the hands of society”**

Today, the Inquiry on Child Abuse and Neglect in Institutions and Foster Homes submitted its interim report ‘Child abuse and neglect in institutions and foster homes in the 20th century’ to Minister for Elderly Care and Public Health Maria Larsson.

“The 404 people included in the Inquiry’s interim report have spoken of neglect and abuse on a scale I would never have thought possible. The adults given the task of protecting these people as children have failed in this task. Society, in the sense of the state and the municipalities, have not lived up to their responsibility. The Government should therefore initiate a process of amends which starts with an apology to all those affected,” says Inquiry Chair Göran Johansson.

When it is completed in 2011, the Inquiry will include over 1 000 people. This interim report presents the results of the first 404 interviews up to January 2009. Those interviewed by the Inquiry have all spoken of neglect and/or abuse in foster homes and/or institutions. Based on these interviews, the Inquiry has compiled eight chapters on this neglect/abuse: Neglect; Physical violence using blunt objects; Other physical violence; Threats and threatening situations; Exploitation for work; Violation of integrity, victimisation and injustices; Sexual abuse; and Coercion, rules and punishment.

“The foster parents and institution staff who are alleged to have neglected and abused the interviewees as children had been entrusted by society to look after the children placed in their care. The interviewees’ accounts show that instead they were exploited and in several cases mistreated, exposed to sexual abuse, violations and threats. In this sense, I think that the neglect and abuse they suffered was at the hands of society,” says Mr Johansson.

Most of the interviewees have stated that they were subjected to several moves. There was a consistent lack of information given to these children when they were taken into care or moved to a different home/institution.

Several of the interviewees describe this as one of the reasons why they feel so rootless today. Most of the interviewees have stated that there was a disregard for inspections and monitoring of their placements. Only a few remember regular inspection visits, and in several cases, the inspection officers did not speak to the child, despite the fact that it was stated in the existing laws and recommendations that the child was the most important part of the inspection.

“It is important we stress that society as a whole is responsible. If similar circumstances are to be avoided in future, the safety of the children in public care must be strengthened. This can be achieved by those responsible following the rules that are in place and sanctions being enforced against those who endanger children’s safety. What has emerged from the interviews is that it was primarily local practices that were at fault, not the laws,” concludes Mr Johansson.

The Inquiry proposes that the Government take the initiative to make amends to those affected, and this process should, for example, include the following steps:

- acknowledging Swedish municipalities’ and agencies’ inadequate capability in protecting children in public care from neglect and abuse;
- apologising to those affected;
- taking all the necessary measures to ensure that neglect and abuse at institutions and foster homes does not occur in future;
- taking measures to redress wrongs; and
- taking measures to rehabilitate those affected.

The interim report in Swedish is available for download from the Inquiry’s website: [www.sou.gov.se/vanvard](http://www.sou.gov.se/vanvard)