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## MISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN WON'T PROTECT CHILDREN...

Comments made by Ruby Harrold-Claesson are outright misinformation, according to Save the Children New Zealand's Executive Director, John Bowis.

Ms Harrold-Claesson arrives in New Zealand on Wednesday this week as part of a campaign against the removal of the statutory defence of reasonable force in Section 59 of the Crimes Act. She has previously claimed that the removal of Section 59<sup>1</sup> will lead to parents being prosecuted for smacking their children which she says is based on what has happened in Sweden. Ms Harrold-Claesson's representations of what has happened in Sweden appear to be incorrect.

In 1957 the Swedish Government implemented the change New Zealand is considering – removal of the statutory defence of reasonable force. Then, in 1979 the Swedish Government added a statement to the Children and Parental Code, which explicitly prohibited the use of corporal punishment. This addition was intended as a guideline for parents to follow and as a means of changing attitudes towards the use of corporal punishment. The Children and Parental code is a civil code for which there is no sanction, criminal or otherwise, for breaking the code's prohibition on corporal punishment.

Save the Children New Zealand has consulted it's counterparts in Sweden while working on this issue. Mali Nilsson is the Global Advocacy and Policy Advisor-Violence and Abuse, for Save the Children Sweden. She states that, "The purpose of forbidding all corporal punishment was NOT to punish nor to criminalise harassed parents. Instead the purpose was to satisfy children's human rights, by giving children equal protection of their physical integrity and human dignity. The law gives a clear message that hitting children is wrong.

"A study from the Swedish National Council of Crime Prevention (BRA) on family violence against pre-school children shows us that there is an increased tendency to report cases to the police, BUT the number of serious injuries had decreased in proportion to milder cases and cases without any established injury. The vast majority of reported assaults are for petty or common offences, suggesting that the majority of children are being identified BEFORE serious injury occurs.

"The conclusion is therefore that child abuse in Sweden has decreased. The [Council] also came to the conclusion that the increase in the cases of child abuse reported to the police is the result of increased awareness and support to parents – not an increased tendency to beat

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<sup>1</sup> Section 59 reads: "Every parent or person in place of a parent of a child is justified in using force by way of correction towards a child if that force is reasonable in the circumstances." [Read the bill to change Section 59 of the Crimes Act here](#). [Adobe PDF, 7 Kb] [Read Save the Children's Submission on Section 59 here](#)

children. Instead it shows that we no longer in Sweden tolerate violence against children," Mali Nilsson said.

The Executive Director of Save the Children New Zealand, John Bowis concludes that "the Swedish experience shows that a change to the law, backed up by education and support for parents has played a positive role in the reduction of abuse experienced by children. Child abuse related mortality is rare in Sweden versus one a month in New Zealand. That is good reason for New Zealand to follow suit – not to be misled and misinformed," John Bowis said.

## **Facts and figures**

### National Parental Studies, Sweden:

- In 1980 51% of parents said they had used corporal punishment in the previous year.
- In 2000 this was down to only 8% of parents.

### National Children's studies, Sweden:

- In 1994 65% of children said they had never experienced child abuse.
- In 2000 this was up to 86%.

### National Council for Crime Prevention, Sweden:

- The number of children removed from parents by social workers has reduced by 26% since 1982.