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Study Tour for Officials of the Attorney General's Office of Thailand, Child Rights Protection Bureau: June 22 - July 6, 1996

In June of 1996, the *Centre*, at the request of the Canadian International Development Agency, organized a study tour for officials from the Government of Thailand. The officials were from the Attorney General's Office - Child Rights Protection Bureau. The Thailand officials wished to learn about the Canadian Justice System's approach to child abuse and how children are treated by the justice system as well as by child protection services.

To learn about how Canadian investigators handle child abuse cases to gather all pertinent facts and ascertain the truth, including Canadian practices respecting the use of video-taped depositions as admissible evidence in court.

To learn how the trial court obtains a child victim's testimony, including the use of closed-circuit television and video-taped testimony, and how Canadian courts conduct the trial with this type of electronic equipment.

To learn about the Canadian criminal justice system's administration of child abuse cases, including the use of multi-disciplinary/multi-agency child protection teams and their respective activities.

The Federal Department of Justice provided a complete briefing on the legislative regime, and in particular, on the criminal code provisions dealing with sexual offenses against children. There was an extensive discussion as well on the specific provisions for the testimony of child witnesses in court. Justice officials provided extensive documentation on all the points covered.

The Ottawa-Carleton Police Service provided an extensive training session on the investigation of child-abuse cases, and the specific interview protocols used with child witnesses. The videotaping of the interviews was also covered, as was the working relationships with the Children's Aid Society and the Children's Hospital.

Ontario Crown Counsel provided an overview of evidentiary and other prosecution preoccupations in child abuse cases and explained the orientation services for child witnesses and the victim services offered to children. The courtroom set up for screens and closed circuit television was discussed and displayed.

The Thai officials sat in on a Young Offender's Act case involving assault and a case under the Child Protection Act. There was also an opportunity to meet with the judge hearing the child protection case.

The Children's Aid Society of Ottawa-Carleton provided a full day of briefings on child protection issues in Ontario. The review was comprehensive, from intake and investigation to foster care and adoption.

In British Columbia, the Vancouver Police Department provided another view of child abuse investigations and British Columbia crown prosecutors reviewed their policy and practices with respect to child abuse generally and child sexual abuse.

Because the treatment of child witnesses was a priority for the Thailand delegation, ICCLR arranged for two experts to spend an afternoon discussing these issues. The use of videotapes and other special considerations for children were covered as was the admissibility of other evidence including records of therapists and other usually confidential materials.

In Victoria, the British Columbia Ministry of Social Services, together with the Attorney General's legal counsel for the Ministry, provided a review of the new British Columbia Child Protection Act which has just come into force. This was a particularly useful session as the

British Columbia Act is new and incorporates improvements made to the Acts in other provinces over the last fifteen years.

Finally, the delegation had a most useful session with the Attorney General's Community Justice Branch. This was particularly important as the Community Justice Branch carries out many of the functions expected of the new Child Rights Protection Office in Thailand.

Thanks to the cooperation and good will of representative of federal, provincial and non-governmental organizations, the Thailand officials gained a solid understanding of how the Canadian criminal justice system operates with respect to children as victims and offenders. They also had an in-depth exposure to child protection services.