ISS Statement in the March 2026 Council on General Affairs and Policy of the Hague Conference on Private International Law

HCCH 1996 Child Protection Convention

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The International Social Service welcomes the continued work on cross-border placements and relocation across borders.

Indeed, under the 1996 Child Protection Convention, Article 33 provides an essential framework for cross-border placements by ensuring prior consultation and cooperation between authorities. Yet in practice, this mechanism is not always fully implemented. Consultation may be bypassed or delayed, and awareness of the mandatory nature of Article 33 remains uneven. Strengthening understanding among authorities and practitioners, and developing practical tools such as a Guide and a Model Form, could support more consistent, child-centred implementation.

Regarding the topic of relocation: experience from ISS casework further shows that in situations of separation, parents are often vulnerable, under time pressure, and seeking support from family networks across borders. In such circumstances, some parents may leave their State of habitual residence with their child without fully understanding the legal implications. At the same time, a parent's home is not automatically the child's home: what feels like "returning home" for a parent may mean "leaving home" for the child, whose stability is fragile and dependent on parental decisions.

Awareness of the applicable rules, as well as the adoption of lawful and timely procedures where these are not yet in place, is therefore essential. In this regard, **ISS welcomes the continued development of the principles reflected in the Washington Declaration as an effective instrument to help prevent child abduction and promote child-focused solutions.**

Thank you.