

England 'one of the worst places for children'

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England is one of the worst countries in the developed world in which to be a child, the Children's Commissioner said today.

Sir Albert Aynsley-Green warned of a "crisis at the heart of our society" in the way children are treated by adults.

He said he was "angry" that adults frequently "demonise" children while vulnerable young people continue to die through poverty and neglect.

Speaking as he launched a new five-year plan for his organisation, Sir Albert said children often raised concerns over safety, security and bullying.

"Children exist in a state of great uncertainty," he said. "They feel unsafe on the streets, they often have domestic violence at home and bullying in school and they feel demonised by the adult population."

He said "endless testing" in schools also contributed to children's unhappiness.

Sir Albert condemned the use of Asbos and the "mosquito device" that stops children hanging around in particular areas by emitting a high-pitched sound only audible to children. "We are one of the most child and young person unfriendly countries in the developed world."

It is "exhilarating" to meet children who are interested, passionate and concerned about the world, he said.

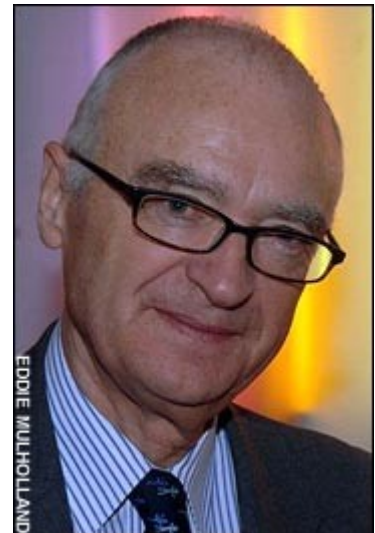
"But I am driven almost to the point of despair when I see the awfulness of so many children's lives.

"That's why I am so angry. I am angry that many people are just not seeing the problem."

Sir Albert's comments followed a Unicef report which branded the UK the worst country in the developed world in terms of children's sense of their own well-being.

His five-year plan was branded "11 Million", a reference to the number of children in England. The plan focuses on key issues facing young people, including youth justice and anti-social behaviour, asylum and trafficking, mental health and enjoying education.

Sir Albert was appointed in March 2005 as the first Children's Commissioner for England, a post set up by the Government to champion the rights of children.



Sir Albert: 'I am angered at the state of many children's lives'

The organisation's theme for the next 12 months will be children's health and happiness.

In the foreword to the document, Sir Albert said: "I believe there is a crisis at the heart of our society. We have been failing children and young people for far too long.

"I am angered at the state of so many children's lives - those in crumbling inner city estates, in poverty, or struggling to access services that should be free and easily available to them. But who cares enough to help?"

He continued: "Our work is firmly grounded in the experiences of children and young people. My door is always open - as are my ears. When nobody else will listen to a child, I will. Together, we'll improve children's lives, rights and happiness."