

Opening Adress of  
Maria Rauch-Kallat  
Federal Minister of Health and Women  
"Alliance against Trafficking in Persons"  
17.3.06

Excellencies,  
Dear Minister Prokop,  
Dear Dr. Konrad,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Being the Austrian Federal Minister for Health and Women, every initiative against trafficking in women and girls is very important to me. To begin with, I would like to thank you for integrating the issue of trafficking in women into the broader context of today`s conference.

On the wake of the Football World Championship the issue of forced prostitution and trafficking in women has become even more topical and urgent than before.

Trafficking in humans **constitutes a crime** and massively violates the human rights to the trafficked persons.

Approximately 80 % of persons trafficked in and into Europe are women, many of them under age. Especially trafficking of **women into forced prostitution** is a profitable business and the numbers of this crime are rising.

However, the consequences – physical and psychological – for the victims are devastating.

The **Council of Europe Convention** against Trafficking in Person was signed by Austria on the first day of the signing period. The ratification of the Convention will take place soon. Unfortunately, many member states of the Council of Europe have not signed the Convention yet. I would like to appeal to all member states of the Council of Europe to sign and ratify the Convention.

On the **European Union** level, Austria actively participated in the preparation for an Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons.

Besides, Austria has entered into numerous **bilateral agreements** with other states, e.g. with the neighbouring countries of Austria, the succession states of former Yugoslavia and further states in Eastern Europe, in Africa and in the Asian and American region.

The Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs established a "**Task Force** against Trafficking" in 2004. In addition to OSCE Special Representative Dr. Helga Konrad, a representative of the "Intervention Center for victims of trafficking in women", and representatives of the relevant Ministries, inter alia of my Ministry, are members of the Task Force. The Task Force works

on a regular basis with experts of the relevant topics and also serves as a contact point for interational cooperation.

Last year I also held a **Round-Table** in the Ministry of Health and Women in order to establish a full survey of the Government's measures against trafficking in women.

Trafficking in human beings is a much broader topic. As Minister for Health and Women, I have to stress the support of victims of trafficking of women.

This is why the Ministry of Health and Women provides **financial rессources**, together with the Federal Ministry of the Interior, for the so-called "Intervention Center for victims of trafficking in women" (the "IBF") in Vienna, which offers help and support to women and girls victims of trafficking. The IBF offers help to women and girls irrespective whether they were trafficked into prostitution, or victims of marriage trafficking or victims of labour exploitation. In the year 2005, 151 women and girls victims were supported by the IBF.

The Intervention Center also runs a shelter in which round-the-clock support and counselling for victims is offered. Counselling is offered to victims in their native language as far as possible. Furthermore, the social workers Intervention Center offers psychological, social and legal support, accompanies the victims to the authorities or to court, and supports their return to their home country or integration in Austria.

A set of legal measures has also been taken:

The criminal offence "trafficking in humans" was introduced into Austrian criminal law:

Furthermore, also the rights of victims of violence, and therefore also of trafficking, have been strengthened in criminal procedure law. As of 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2006, victims of trafficking are entitled to **free psychosocial and legal court attendance**. Psychosocial court attendance shall save victims of violence and trafficking from further traumatization in the criminal proceedings against the perpetrator or the dealer. Legal court attendance aims at ensuring a better protection of the rights of the victims during criminal proceedings.

In the area of **residence law**, victims of trafficking are granted a 30-day recovery and reflection period, in which no measures to end their stay may be taken. I am convinced that this recovery and reflection period, together with the support and counselling by the Intervention Centers, contributes a lot to the psychological stabilization of women victims of trafficking.

Victims of trafficking can furthermore apply for a residence permit on humanitarian grounds, which has a minimum duration of 6 months.

In the area of health care, I have also provided for close cooperation with doctors and a contractual hospital in order to ensure the victim's access to medical care. In cases where

more extensive medical care is necessary, my Ministry has provided an interim solution for covering the costs, as most of the victims of trafficking do not have health insurance in Austria until the decision on their residence permit is taken.

Working with and in the countries of origin of victims is also of crucial importance.

**Austrian consular agencies** in the countries concerned hand out leaflets with the telephone number of the police and the “Intervention center for victims of trafficking in women” upon issuance of a visa. Besides that, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs also supports various projects to minimize trafficking in women or protect and support the victims.

**NGOs** like the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) work in the field of prevention in the countries where most victims stem from and support those who want to return home and start a new life after their dreadful experiences. Building structures and capacity for reintegration in the society and the regular labour market is necessary in order to prevent the victims from being re-trafficked

Although we have set up many measures for combating trafficking in humans and protection of the victims, trafficking in humans is still a crime that is rising.

It is hard to learn that there are new developments like the rise of forced prostitution in the wake of the Football World Championship. However, it is good to know that we are prepared to face and combat them.

Therefore, I hope that today's conference will contribute to this cooperation and I wish you all successful proceedings and concrete output.

Thank you for your attention.