



UNITED NATIONS
Office on Drugs and Crime

**Combating Trafficking in Human Beings,
Prevention – Protection – Prosecution**

Vienna, 17 March 2006

**Antonio Maria Costa
Executive Director**

Ministers,
Vice President,
Secretary General,
Director General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome Austria's initiative in moving human trafficking up the European Union's agenda. The Minister of the Interior in particular is to be commended for promoting comprehensive training for law enforcement officers responsible for combating trafficking in children. When looking at the performance of criminal justice systems in the countries represented in this hall, and beyond, I am surprised (at times disappointed) by the low rates of convictions for the perpetrators of human trafficking and exploitation. So awareness-raising efforts like this are welcome. Minister Prokop, you have my admiration and our collective thanks.

I also applaud the OSCE's Belgian Chairmanship for making the fight against organized crime, and against human trafficking, a priority. In meetings with the representatives of the Chairmanship and with the OSCE Secretary General to discuss how best to respond, we agreed to redouble our cooperative efforts to address this crime.

Human trafficking is a key area of work at UNODC, and a part of our general mandate against organized crime. The legal foundations are laid down in the relevant UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons – a Protocol, as you know, that supplements the 2003 Convention against Organized Crime. But we do not only address the drama of human trafficking and exploitation as part of our crime control regime. We have, and feel, a moral responsibility.

Taken together -- the UN Protocol, the EU instrument, the OSCE action plan as well as the different national strategies -- demonstrate that there is no shortage of manifestos to fight modern slavery.

But as my Latin ancestors used to say, *verba volant, scripta manent*. Literally *words fly by, written commitments stay*. In other words, the reality check of such anti-slavery commitments is whether they succeed in curbing this ugly trade, reducing the victims' suffering and punishing the perpetrators.

A Perverse Economic Model

So far 52 OSCE States have signed the UN Protocol and 38 have ratified it. That's not bad, though you can do better and urgently. Personally I am not sure if the problem is getting worse, or we are just more aware of it, or both. For sure, I know that we need to take immediate action.

There are no precise figures on human trafficking and exploitation. Yet, to give you a sense of the depth and breadth of the problem, consider the following unorthodox logical model.

First consideration. Since the world woke up to this problem about a decade ago, the number of people around the world who have been trafficked – and therefore exploited – may be equivalent to the population of a medium-size European economy. In other words, we are talking of several million people.

Second consideration. The annual GDP (the revenue, I mean) generated by the people that make up our very real, tragic economy may also be equivalent to that of a medium-size European country. In other words, we are talking of several tens billion dollars of blood money.

Third consideration. This tragic economy, based on slavery, is also very competitive, characterized by market prices for the services and the products it generates, and by practically zero-labour costs and zero-charges related to taxation, safety, the environment and so forth. This slave economy thus makes rates of return very, very high. On the one hand are the entrepreneurs, namely the traffickers, who rake in the bulk of the revenue. At their mercy are the victims paid (if at all) a fraction of the product they generate.

This scenario may seem far-fetched, as I deliberately have represented it as a provocation. But such a perverse economy does exist, to varying extent, in every country touched by trafficking.

We at UNODC decided to illustrate the extent of the problem by putting together a world-premier: a report on *Global Patterns in the Trafficking in Persons*. It will demonstrate the extent to which trafficking is a world-wide problem that involves countries of origin, transit and destination – rich and poor, democratic and totalitarian, from the northern as well as the southern hemisphere. We are also working with Oscar nominated film producer Robert Bilheimer on a documentary film on human trafficking. Governments and the general public need

to be confronted with the reality that this evil is going on within and across all our borders.

Honouring Commitments

What's my message today?

I will do nothing more than ask you a few questions. Since UNODC is the custodian of the Protocol, let me remind you what you have signed up for. It is then for you to check whether your commitment to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in human beings is being honoured in your country.

Let me start with the obvious, first point: prevention.

1. Have you established comprehensive national programmes to combat human trafficking and protect the victims?
2. Have you implemented, together with civil society, media campaigns to warn potential victims of the dangers of trafficking, to raise awareness and discourage demand?
3. Have you undertaken measures to alleviate the vulnerability of people (women and children in particular) to trafficking, such as poverty, ignorance and discrimination?
4. Have you developed networks to exchange information on trafficking routes, traffickers profiles and victims identification?

Now, let me move on to prosecution, with more questions.

1. The UN Protocol obliges parties to make human trafficking a criminal offence. Assuming you have done that, is the system of penalties congruous with the severity of the crime?
2. Do your laws protect the victims, especially children?

Allow me to continue to be your conscience and move on to protection.

1. Do you provide for the physical, psychological and social recovery of victims, offer housing and counselling in the victims' language?
2. Are your systems able to deal with the special needs of women and children?
3. Are victims protected following rescue and do they get compensation?

I am sure that you are familiar with these questions and – following ratification of the UN Protocol – have put in place means to strengthen prevention, prosecution and protection. However, if you are in doubt about any aspect of the Protocol, or have difficulties to respond adequately to the legal obligations imposed by it, we at UNODC can help. For example our *Global Programme against Trafficking in Human Beings* has developed training modules, a best practice toolkit and on-line resources. And we offer technical assistance in capacity building.

I close my statement by again complimenting the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior and the International Organization for Migration for the comprehensive training for law enforcement authorities that they have been carrying out. This kind of practical work is the best hope we can offer to the victims of this modern day slavery, to rescue them and to make sure that they and their children will face a less tragic future.

Thank you for your attention.