

**STATEMENT BY FEDERAL MINISTER PROKOP ON THE
OCCASION OF THE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON COMBATING
TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS, ESPECIALLY WOMEN AND
CHILDREN: PREVENTION, PROTECTION AND PROSECUTION**

Vienna, 17 March 2006

Madam Commissioner,
Distinguished Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you today to the OSCE on the occasion of this conference.

This high-level conference marks the conclusion of the project “Comprehensive Training for Law Enforcement Authorities Responsible for Trafficking in Children and Minors”, which, I am happy to say, was supported by the European Commission under the AGIS programme 2005. An additional sponsor, along with the Austrian Federal Ministry for Internal Affairs, was the Swedish Foreign Ministry.

The project was implemented by the Austrian Ministry for Internal Affairs jointly with the International Organization for Migration. We also received active support from the OSCE, especially from Dr. Konrad and her team, and from Europol, the Swedish Foreign Ministry and the Federal Police of Belgium.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank all the aforementioned partners for their excellent co-operation and to express the hope that we will continue to work closely with one another in the future.

In addition, I should like to thank the trainers and participants who took part in the international training seminar held this week from Tuesday till Thursday at my ministry (on Herrengasse and at Minoritenplatz), where they had an opportunity to exchange and build on their experiences with regard to interviewing techniques and investigatory methods as they apply to trafficking in children.

I am pleased that all the States involved are aware of this problem and that there is a growing recognition of the need for international co-operation in this area.

At the European level, the Hague Programme was adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council in November 2004, which, among other things, instructed the Commission and the Council to devise a plan in 2005 so that common norms and model procedures and mechanisms for preventing and combating trafficking in human beings might be developed.

This European Union (EU) plan has now been in existence since December 2005, and it was Austria, as the then “future” holder of the Presidency of the Council, that played a key role in drawing it up.

In harmony with this EU plan, the Austrian Presidency has set itself three goals in the area of trafficking in human beings:

First, the Austrian Presidency would like to arrive at a better collective understanding of these problems and achieve maximum effectiveness in dealing with them through pooled efforts.

Second, the Austrian Presidency supports an approach based on human rights and the needs of the victims.

Third, the Austrian Presidency supports the call for the European Union to step up its operational measures to combat trafficking in human beings.

The efforts to combat human trafficking will also be the subject of a meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 27 and 28 April 2006.

The fight against trafficking in human beings is one of the main concerns of the Austrian Presidency of the Council, and I will personally give this initiative my full and unstinting support.

The Austrian Ministry for Internal Affairs is organizing to this end several events and projects on this subject within the framework of the EU Council Presidency.

I regard it as important that the public should be sensitized to the issue of crimes in the form of human trafficking. For this reason, the involvement of the media is also an important aspect in combating this trade.

Today it is important to form transborder alliances for combating trafficking in human beings, and for that reason I am gratified that so many of you have seen fit to take part in this conference.

The building of networks and the definition of common interests and goals is particularly important in the common struggle against trafficking in women and children.

With this focus as part of its EU Presidency, Austria is continuing its efforts to fight against human trafficking, efforts that have since won recognition internationally as well.

For example, in its annual report, the United States Department of State expressly praises Austria for its achievements in the fight against trafficking in human beings. In particular, Austria's co-operation with the Romanian police and the Hungarian border control police as well as the highly developed arrangements for the protection of victims and the financial support of non-governmental organizations actively involved in combating human trafficking are singled out for special mention in that report.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish you all a stimulating conference and a pleasant stay in Vienna.

Thank you for your attention.