



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

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Opening Remarks

Working Session “Combating trafficking in human beings,
with a particular focus on trafficking in children”

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Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues,

I am delighted and honoured to be with you today to moderate this session of the Review conference on combating trafficking in human beings, with a particular focus on trafficking in children. I wish to thank the Kazakh Chairmanship for this opportunity.

Where do we stand?

This year the Kazakh Chairmanship has placed Trafficking in Human Beings, and in particular, child trafficking high on the political agenda. And indeed the OSCE participating States are committed to combating trafficking in children, as reflected in the Addendum to the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, and in subsequent commitments recognizing the need to intensify such efforts and addressing vulnerability of children to various forms of exploitation, including trafficking for labour exploitation (our focus today).

In this framework today's forward-looking discussion -together with its Astana segment- mark an important step on the road to the summit. It provides a forum for participating States to review the implementation of the anti-trafficking commitments and to identify common challenges and shared priorities for future OSCE work.

Before opening the discussion I would like to briefly share with you some reflections on the current state of play and the key issues we should tackle to step up anti-trafficking action.

What is THB child trafficking today: modern day slavery and TNT

Every day, millions of people – among them a significant proportion of children – are deceived, abused, coerced and threatened into sexual and labour exploitation, and forced begging, or are exploited for any other illicit profitable purpose. Typically their documents are confiscated, and they are forced to work or provide services during long hours, often to pay back an insurmountable debt in conditions that amount to slavery. They are socially isolated and often unable to speak or understand the local language. Often, they are exposed to ill and degrading treatment including rape, psychological and sexual abuse, confinement, and physical punishment. They may also be held captive with subtle psychological coercion, so that the person may not reasonably believe that she or he has the possibility to leave.

This is the reality of human trafficking today. It is a massive phenomenon of modern-day slavery. It is also one of the worst forms of violence against children, both boys and girls.

Trafficking shows no sign of abating world-wide. On the contrary, it is a growing phenomenon and mostly an organized crime business which largely goes unpunished and with its inexhaustible source of profits fuels other crimes (especially corruption and money laundering), threatens the rule of law and proper functioning of democratic institutions and infiltrates the legal economy. In other words trafficking poses a concrete threat to international and national security.

At what point have we arrived in the struggle against trafficking? We have made significant progress during the last ten years, thanks to the efforts and partnerships of governments, international organizations and NGOs. However, much important work remains to be done. Let me mention only a couple of challenging issues.

Challenging issues:

Identification and detention

Trafficking severely undermines and devastates the freedom, dignity and health of millions of people, especially children. It deprives children of their childhood and may compromise their life.

Yet, not all forms of trafficking are adequately addressed in many countries, for example domestic servitude or forced begging. Furthermore, children are often treated as adults without being provided with the special protection measures to which they are entitled. This means not only that they are rarely recognized as victims of a serious crime and human rights violation but that they are also treated as adult irregular migrants. The reality in the OSCE region is that children may be detained in placement centres for irregular migrants, denied access to essential services and proper care, often expelled and exposed easily to the risk of re-trafficking.

The challenge therefore is to ensure the identification and adequate assistance and protection of every child victim. Child victims must be considered and treated as children first and foremost. We need to ensure the full and effective implementation of the international standards (including the Trafficking Protocol and the Council of Europe Convention where appropriate) and of the UNICEF guidelines for the protection of child victims of trafficking.

Prevention

Protect children from violence and abuse is a matter of urgency to better prevent child trafficking. Children must be provided with the effective protection from any violation of their rights and, thus, from becoming an easy prey for traffickers.

The protection of the rights of every child is key to prevent trafficking in children. The challenge is therefore to ensure the primacy of the rights of children as set out in international

standards and in particular in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). And crucially this approach needs to be reflected in concrete procedures and practices on the ground with and for children.

This means that to effectively prevent trafficking in children, States need first to focus their efforts on translating into practice the international commitments and obligations they have endorsed. They also need to build and/or strengthen child care and protection systems in order to respond to the specific needs of children without any kind of discrimination and regardless of their immigration status. The aim is to guarantee the survival and development of children to the maximum extent possible.

Furthermore, it is necessary to strengthen the care and protection of migrant, undocumented, unaccompanied, separated and asylum seeking and refugee children to better prevent child trafficking. It is also imperative that public authorities ensure that a safe and durable solution is identified for each child and taking his or her best interests as primary consideration.

Moreover, collective efforts should be strengthened to prevent child trafficking particularly in sectors where child labour is most prevalent, such as agriculture and domestic work.

Conclusion

Against this background and challenges, we should explore ways to strengthen the implementation of OSCE anti-trafficking commitments and relevant recommendations. We should discuss how to reinforce mechanisms to follow up systematically on such implementation also building upon and valuing the work done by the OSCE institutions, executive structures and field operations.

Trafficking is modern day slavery and an unacceptable violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. I am hopeful that the commitment to eradicate modern forms of slavery will be renewed and figure prominently in the outcomes of the Astana Summit.