

**“The Austrian efforts to combat domestic servitude in diplomatic households”**

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Madame Chairperson,  
Dear Ambassadors,  
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me express my thanks to the OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Ms. Maria-Grazia Giammarinaro for organizing this event. I am honoured to address this meeting of the “Alliance against Trafficking in persons” in my capacity as Austrian National Coordinator on Combating Human Trafficking. I would also like to thank the OSCE Chairmanship of Kazakhstan for their efforts to put the topic of Human Trafficking high on their agenda.

During this conference we discuss a very sensitive topic “Domestic Servitude”. This form of modern slavery does exist today - despite the fact that it is internationally banned. It happens mainly in private households and behind closed doors. In many cases, diplomatic staff and employees of international organizations are involved as perpetrators.

Last year, the Austrian Foreign Ministry organized an exhibition together with UNODC on “Domestic slavery – Esclavage Moderne” of the French NGO “Comite contre esclavage moderne”. This exhibition showed that human trafficking does not stop in front at our doorsteps – it happens around us.

All the stories presented by the exhibition followed the same cruel pattern: young girls were lured into Europe by offering them – ironically - a chance for a better life. Many of them were sent to relatives; others

were trafficked by professional criminal groups. They were promised to be treated as family members by their rich “employers” who soon behaved like “owners” or “rulers”. After being deprived of their passports, there was no longer any talk of attending a school, earning a salary or being treated as part of the family. They had to serve as slaves and work long hours; they were humiliated, physically abused and often even had to suffer hunger. What is worse, the offenders, due to their status and related privileges, were hardly ever prosecuted let alone sentenced.

By summarizing the gist of this exhibition, I would like to illustrate that similar stories do happen in diplomatic households in Austria – and we know about some of them specifically even though the known cases are probably just the tip of the iceberg.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the last years – also due to increased media coverage and awareness-raising-campaigns - more and more people realized that human trafficking is a terrible crime which affects us all. In Austria, we know that– besides the sexual exploitation of women and child trafficking – slave-like situations of domestic servants is one of the most frequent phenomena.

The Austrian inter-ministerial Task Force on Combating Human Trafficking put the topic “domestic servitude” high on its agenda. The Austrian Foreign Ministry, which coordinates the work of the Task Force, feels particularly responsible when it comes to the exploitation of domestic workers of diplomatic staff based in Austria. As host country to a number of important international organisations dealing with the issue of human security, such as UNODC, Austria feels especially responsible in this field.

Therefore, the Austrian Foreign Ministry took a number of stringent measures geared to ensure the protection of domestic staff in diplomatic households in Austria. These measures reflect the comprehensive approach taken by Austria in combating human trafficking which is characterised by the well-known four P`s: prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership.

#### Prevention:

In order to tackle the issue of domestic servitude in the diplomatic community in Austria, the Ministry introduced a number of additional prerequisites relating to the notification of private household employees

of diplomats at the end of 2009. These measures were taken in order to draw the attention of the diplomatic community to the issue and thus enforce the rights of domestic workers.

By introducing supplementary measures, the Ministry aims, on the one hand, at sensitizing the diplomatic community with regard to a topic, which to my knowledge not all diplomats consider a human trafficking issue. On the other hand, it aims at protecting the rights of domestic workers.

Inter alia, it is now compulsory for private household employees to register personally with their consulate in Austria and to appear in our Ministry (at least once a year) in person in order to pick up their legitimation card. The domestic employee is thus given a possibility to be received individually, to get information about his or her rights and – in case of need – to get an opportunity to talk and get help.

As an essential measure of preventing exploitation of private household employees, a number of documents have to be presented to and checked by the Ministry when a diplomat applies for a visa for his future household employee (e.g. copies of a working contract, of the floor plan of the apartment with the room assigned to the employee, a copy of the lease contract, of the travel insurance and a copy of the letter of commitment). Furthermore, the Ministry can request proof of the salary payment made to the private household employee at any time. The minimum salary is currently € 1.000, 15 times per year.

Noncompliance with one of these prerequisites results in the denial of the issuance of a visa or of a legitimation card to the private household employee.

It happens more often than you might assume that the Foreign Ministry is informed by the nation-wide “Centre for Victims of Trafficking in Women” LEFÖ-IBF about a possible case of human trafficking related to domestic servitude. Furthermore, the Foreign Ministry sometimes receives information from Austrian embassies abroad or from the domestic employees or their embassies directly.

In this respect, I would also like to mention that thanks to the work of LEFÖ-IBF “Intervention Centre for Victims of Trafficking in Women”, female victims who have been trafficked to Austria and had to live here under slave-like conditions can be supported. For child victims a special shelter was created in Vienna – “Die Drehscheibe”. Since April 2009, all victims of trafficking and of cross-border dealings in prostitution are

granted a provisional residence permit for a minimum period of six months in order to guarantee criminal prosecution of the trafficker. Moreover, the Ministry of Interior carries out a witness protection programme for victims of trafficking which, under specific conditions, includes their close relatives.

The direct contact with the intervention centre for trafficked women enables the Foreign Ministry to act immediately and to support the investigations of a particular case led by other Austrian authorities, such as the Ministries of the Interior or Justice. As soon as we are informed about a certain case, we use all our means available to support a possible victim of domestic slavery in domestic households. The Austrian Foreign Ministry follows a policy, whereby every single case is taken seriously and investigated. We believe that Diplomatic immunity should never “protect” a person who commits such a terrible crime. We consider those cases as severe human rights violations and take every effort possible to hold the perpetrators accountable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We can only fight human trafficking effectively if we all act together in a spirit of partnership. Therefore, I would like to make a few recommendations which support this principle.

We think it would be useful to exchange information on the measures introduced by other countries with regard to the prerequisites for the employment of domestic employees by diplomats and adjust each others preventive measures. The Alliance on Combating Trafficking in persons – with its informal and unique mechanism for permanent consultation – could provide a forum to discuss those issues among the OSCE participating states.

We would also like to recommend to international organizations based in Vienna to organize awareness-raising-campaigns for their employees. Members of the diplomatic community must be aware of the fact that the exploitation of domestic staff constitutes a severe violation of human rights. I can assure you that the Austrian Foreign Ministry will be a partner in this respect and that it will support these campaigns wherever possible.

Finally, the establishment of ombudspersons in International Organizations also proved to be a helpful measure to detect the crime and to support the protection of rights of private domestic workers. We know that some International Organizations in Austria have already

established such an entity. We would like to encourage the others to do the same.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We should never forget that human trafficking is a crime that shames us all. It is therefore our task to open our eyes, draw attention to this issue and so actively fight modern slavery.

Thank you for your attention!