

BBC Radio, 23 January 2003

**Interview with Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Osmo Lipponen**

***Ambassador Lipponen speaks about trafficking***

(translation of transcript in Albanian)

On Thursday, a three-day workshop organised by the OSCE, aimed at evaluating the Women's Rights and Anti-Trafficking Education (WRATE) project, will start in Tirana. This project started in November 2000.

**Arben Manaj of the Albanian Section of the BBC Service talked with OSCE Ambassador in Albania Osmo Lipponen and started with the question why the OSCE considered this project so important.**

**Lipponen:** The history is clear. When we started this program, no one dealt with this extremely important and major issue in Albania. We initiated the launching of the first awareness raising debates, as well as contributed to the local officials' start in dealing with this issue.

**BBC:** Ambassador Lipponen, why do you consider this issue important now?

**Lipponen:** This is still a big issue, although the figures for the trafficking in human beings and infants have probably been reduced a little bit. Thousands of Albanians are still being trafficked every year, either willingly or unwillingly, after receiving false promises. This is a big industry and is severely damaging this country.

**BBC:** Ambassador, can you tell us whether this project achieved any results since November 2000, when you started?

**Lipponen:** Yes, the project has achieved a lot. I think the greatest achievement is the growing public awareness that trafficking is something unacceptable. I think that although the level of awareness has increased, it has not yet reached the right standard, and this is perhaps the most efficient way of combating trafficking, i.e. to make people understand that this is not a normal thing. Thus, the stands are changing and experts believe that people are increasingly changing their minds. We have also assisted with the launching of the national strategy on anti-trafficking and implementation of this strategy has started.

**BBC:** Ambassador Lipponen, what are some of the preventive measures and what is the assistance offered to the victims of trafficking and were they successful?

**Lipponen:** I think they have been successful. We have a sheltering system for the victims of trafficking, and several hundred women benefit from our services and support every

year. Obviously, the new witness protection program is and remains extremely important in the future. Co-operation with and training of police has produced very good results. However, there is still room for improvement.

**BBC:** Apart from training, what else could be useful in the fight against trafficking in women?

**Lipponen:** Of course, social and economic conditions are certainly essential. Economic and social reforms are the best weapon to combat trafficking.

**BBC:** Mr. Lipponen, what message will you deliver to the three-day meeting organised by the OSCE?

**Lipponen:** Although we have achieved a lot of progress, we have to continue to work very hard in the future and in all the aspects of raising the public awareness. We have to make sure that a certain number of judicial cases corresponds to the number of sentences given according to the law.