



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Talking Points of Ms. Eva Biaudet, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

“ALLIANCE AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS”

Assistance to Trafficked Persons: We Can Do Better

Vienna, Hofburg, 10-11 September 2007

Excellencies,

Dear participants of the 7th *Alliance against Trafficking in Persons* Conference,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Also I want to start by welcoming you all to the 7th *Alliance against Trafficking in Persons* Conference, focusing on victim identification, protection and assistance, and related research. I am grateful to all of you for coming to Vienna for these two days to address this important subject. I am indeed very pleased that so many experts and people in operative functions from the OSCE capitals have taken time to participate in this event, and I especially want to thank our panelists who have come here to share with us their expertise and experience.

UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON

The OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings was endorsed by the OSCE Ministerial Council in 2003. In the following years many participating States have made serious efforts to implement many of its recommendations. Unfortunately, however, serious gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of trafficking still exist and we have to admit that research-based empirical evidence is lacking regarding the impact of our national and international anti-trafficking policy responses and practices.

What we do know today is that human trafficking is systematic, well organized, and growing despite our efforts in recent years to combat it. Indeed, all the information we have indicates that this modern form of slavery is by no means decreasing, neither globally nor in the OSCE region. We know that trafficking flourishes because of gaps in our national legislations or its' poor implementation, because of structural weaknesses of our economic and migration policies, high vulnerability of women, children and men who are pushed into the trap of trafficking by poverty, marginalization, gender or other forms of discrimination, unemployment and other social factors. We know that trafficking has broad negative effects on our societies. It fuels criminal networks, imposes heavy costs on our economies, wastes human resources, and erodes democratic human values, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In a time when global unemployment is higher than ever before and the world's population is growing at a faster rate than jobs are created, we have to recognize that these structural challenges, combined with failures in our policy responses, if not dealt with, will even further increase vulnerability, stimulate irregular migration, and inevitably multiply numbers of persons trafficked for the purpose of exploitation.

Trafficking is further a result of corruption, ignorance and indifference, and we know that in order to combat trafficking successfully, we must address the complex structural factors that create favourable environments for exploitation. We must expand our traditional way of thinking about trafficking. It can no longer be seen and tackled as an isolated issue.

These challenges and seeking effective responses to them, have to be the basis shaping the OSCE ant-trafficking agenda.

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY STATES

The 2006 Annual Report issued by my office showed that our participating States identified the lack of reliable information and adequate knowledge on the scope of trafficking, the identification of victims and the establishment of protection mechanisms as serious challenges. States indicated a need for further information on the changing patterns of trafficking, the scope of child trafficking, the complex relationships between traffickers and victims, and the

discrepancies between estimated numbers of victims and identified victims. Several States recommended additional research and data collection, and indicated that this should be accompanied by increased data sharing among international actors. The report confirmed what was expected; that the number of identified victims remain low compared to the estimates of trafficking victims within the OSCE region.

Recognizing these challenges, the 2006 OSCE Brussels Ministerial Decision (MC.DEC/14/06, “Enhancing Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, Including for Labour Exploitation, through a Comprehensive and Proactive Approach”) underscored the need to improve research and the system of data collection and analysis.

AIM OF THE CONFERENCE

This conference is a response to these articulated challenges, and it should be seen as a continuation of the 6th Alliance Conference held in Vienna in May this year on National Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms. Improved research and the establishment of National Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms complement each other; both strive at accurate reporting on trafficking and provide valuable information to policy-makers and practitioners. Nevertheless, we have to remind ourselves that a lack of absolute knowledge of numbers or the dynamics of this cruel criminality does not excuse a lack of political will and action to combat trafficking. There is a lot all of us can do – today we will learn how to do it better.

With this in mind, our aim with this conference is to identify how we can increase our understanding of human trafficking, and how we can develop our policies and responses. The conference will do so by looking at high-quality research by leading experts from international organizations, NGOs and institutes working in the OSCE region. We will explore a wide range of practices in identifying, protecting and assisting women, children and men, trafficked for all forms of exploitation. And, I truly hope that these recent research findings on anti-trafficking work will encourage governments of all participating States to address the gaps that still persist in policies and practices.

We have chosen a victim-centred approach in analysing the assistance offered to trafficked persons, and we have been fortunate in bringing together officials and experts in the field of assistance and protection who will provide you with an insider's perspective based on the latest qualitative and quantitative research.

The conference will look at new proposals to address victims' needs, the reasons why victims often reject assistance and protection, and ways to improve the situation. Besides being crucial for recovery and re-integration, proper assistance and protection, we now know, is imperative in getting victims to co-operate effectively with law enforcement agencies.

I recommend that the OSCE delegations and officials from capitals take the opportunity to expand their networks and build contacts with the experts we have gathered, representing the leading international organizations and institutions working in this field.

Finally, this event will of course also be used to formulate some concrete recommendations to assist our participating States in advancing the implementation of their OSCE anti-trafficking commitments.

RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

Until recently, the focus of anti-trafficking research has been on practically oriented studies, often conducted within a limited time-frame and with limited resources. Very few research projects have been long-term and looking at the causes of trafficking and how to prevent it. Further, very few evaluations have been made on the impact of anti-trafficking responses and policies by governments and organizations. Studies based on field research in countries of origin and destination - focusing on interviewing victims of trafficking - have been scarce.

Today we know that in order to understand and fight trafficking better, and help victims of trafficking more successfully, we need in-depth studies of the experiences of trafficking victims looking not only at their pre-identification experiences, but importantly also at their possibilities to recover and reintegrate into society. I am therefore very pleased that many of the presentations we will hear are based on victims' testimony, and look not only at how victims can be assisted, but also how potential victims can be prevented from exploitation.

As I said, focusing on victims when designing research projects is important, but we should also try to study the traffickers; their motives and modus operandi. Actions taken or not taken by the different actors involved in combating trafficking, such as law enforcement agencies and service providers should also be scrutinised.

Trafficking is such a complex problem that there is a strong need to study it from a multidisciplinary perspective. In order to give us a clearer view we need to encourage research that tackles the phenomenon from a wide variety of angles, including human rights, gender, migration, economics, and law enforcement.

Illustrative of our current lack of knowledge is the fact that different estimates of governments and international organizations on the numbers of trafficked persons vary so much. Numerous anti-trafficking policy decisions in many countries have in recent years been influenced by these estimates. They are, however, highly questionable because of weaknesses in methodology, lack of data and non-comparability.

Better estimates, both at the national and global level, would of course be welcome, but they should definitely not be our primary focus when looking at fields where more research is needed. Instead I want to reiterate that emphasis should be on evaluating the effectiveness of anti-trafficking policies and programs, and on producing reliable information on trends and changing patterns of trafficking, profiling of victims, and modus operandi used by traffickers; for example how they choose their victims. Unfortunately most of this is lacking and currently there is very little evidence available that would indicate the impact of different types of anti-trafficking efforts.

Dear representatives of our participating States, we need your political will and financial support to fund such research. And I promise you, it will definitely be worthwhile, since you will be able to design your policy responses and programs based on evidence instead of assumptions.

THE PRESENTATIONS

The presentations we will hear during these two days, however, are an example of obvious progress. These projects represent high-quality research on some of the topics I just mentioned. They have a victim-centred approach; they emphasize that trafficked persons have to be involved in the design of assistance programs; their objective is to tailor assistance measures to fit the needs of victims; and they look at how to improve responses.

Listening to these presentations we will gain insight into important issues such as: prevention among vulnerable groups, identifying risk factors for children, and policy gaps – such as the trafficking of men. We will be provided with overviews of experiences and challenges in victim identification and referral to support services, health consequences of trafficking, why victims decline assistance, and the ability of victims to take informed decisions about their co-operation with law enforcement and immigration agencies.

FINALLY

Dear ladies and gentlemen! In my opinion, this conference is an example of the OSCE at its best. We are here to increase our understanding of trafficking, one of the real and increasing contemporary threats to security. We are showing best practices of how to meet these challenges. We are trying to do our utmost to improve the lives of our citizens - fellow human beings.

But, we still have a long way ahead of us. It is inconceivable that, the very same year that we have celebrated the bicentennial of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, we still don't have a clearer picture of the scope of trafficking. Nor have we been able to decrease the inhuman exploitation of hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of our fellow human beings, women, children and men. Unfortunately, we have not yet been able raise the fight against trafficking to a higher political level, where it would be seen as a dimension of security both at the individual and state level.

Trafficking can flourish only in environments in which States and people fail to guarantee the rights of all persons living within their jurisdiction. Victims belonging to national, ethnic or

religious minorities will be identified and their rights will be respected only in societies where tolerance, mutual respect and equal opportunities prevail and where people are not left alone because they are migrants, foreigners or belong to a minority.

Let us together do everything we can to change the pattern and make the OSCE region a hostile environment for traffickers and exploitation!

Let us make this region truly safe and secure for all human beings, indifferent to age, sex, ethnic origin, religion or vulnerable situation. Let us make our region truly civilized!

Thank you, dear Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen for your attention!