

The participating States share a common commitment to fight trafficking in human beings, and the OSCE serves as a political and action-oriented tool to help tackle this complex problem, says Eva Biaudet, the OSCE's Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. Prior to her appointment in October 2006, Ms. Biaudet was Finland's Minister of Health and Social Services and a member of parliament. She launched a Nordic-Baltic campaign against trafficking in human beings and helped shape the country's trafficking-related legislation. For "leading the fight against human trafficking with a humanistic approach", she was recently made a Knight (Chevalier) of the Legion of Honour, the highest decoration in France. In an interview with Sonya Yee, Press and Public Information Officer at the OSCE Secretariat, Ms. Biaudet discusses the importance of bringing co-operation between local actors to an international level to better protect the rights of trafficking victims. She also calls for better data-gathering and analysis to enable a more proactive and evidence-based approach to tackling the phenomenon.



COURTESY OF PETRI KROOK

INTERVIEW WITH THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE AND CO-ORDINATOR FOR COMBATING TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

Eva Biaudet: Rights of victims are paramount in fight against human trafficking

Sonya Yee: How does fighting trafficking in human beings fit into the OSCE's work as a security organization?

Eva Biaudet: The concept of comprehensive security can be traced back to the early beginnings of the OSCE: The security of a State is linked with the security of its people. This means that States have a serious obligation to protect their citizens from having their rights violated — and being trafficked and exploited is an abhorrent violation of human rights.

The comprehensive mandate of my Office is sharply focused on the prevention of human

trafficking, the protection of victims and the prosecution of criminals. Most people associate trafficking with illegal border crossings, but boundaries, whether east or west, don't mean much as far as this criminal activity is concerned.

What we should really be concerned about is that human trafficking is all about exploitation — whether it is for sexual purposes, or whether it takes the form of forced begging, using children for criminal activities or treating men and women like slaves in farms, factories and households, or even engaging in the illicit purchasing and selling of human organs. There is no limit

to what criminals are capable of doing to exploit their fellow human beings.

The OSCE is becoming increasingly known as a leading advocate for the establishment of national rapporteurs on trafficking. Why are they important?

In their efforts to respond more effectively to the various issues surrounding trafficking, governments and their partners need more and better information on what the many faces of trafficking are, what the scale and scope of the problem are, what the trends are, how these are being addressed, and which responses work best.

Of course other organizations are providing their own set of useful data, but the monitoring and analysis that officials need to enable them to draw up more responsive policies and procedures are still missing. A national rapporteur or an equivalent mechanism is meant to fill this gap in reliable knowledge and information. The fact that the instrument is at the national level also sends a message that the responsibility for addressing this issue lies with governments.

One more thing — the greater the number of countries that establish such an institution, the easier it will be for national counterparts to share information at the international level. This is why we are devoting so much of our energy to promoting the concept.

How is the OSCE helping participating States to establish these mechanisms?

We are assisting them to implement their commitments. Towards this purpose, we organized two important meetings in the past two years within the framework of the Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons. This is a unique international forum that the OSCE is funding to harmonize the strategies and agendas of all actors engaged in the fight against human trafficking, thereby avoiding duplication. So far, we have made it possible for countries to come together and share best experiences and lessons learned. Our most recent initiative was when we invited experts who are actually performing the national rapporteur function to exchange views at a seminar that we organized in September.

Some countries — Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Romania and the United States, for example — already have a national rapporteur function in place. They are finding it to be a helpful tool, but acknowledge that they are still going through a learning process. No two countries have exactly the same mechanism as they have had to adapt these to their own needs and circumstances.

However, there are certain features that we consider extremely important. We think that national rapporteurs should have a legal basis so they can gain access to sensitive information, while also being held responsible for protecting this information.

We also think that a national rapporteur should issue an independent report addressing all forms of trafficking in the country, preferably once a year. The report should evaluate government measures to combat the problem and include information not only from the judiciary but also from all the bodies, agencies and services concerned. It should be the focus of discussions among parliamentarians, who are the ones deciding on budgets and legislation. But it shouldn't stop there; the report should be made public and be shared with key people in regions and municipalities throughout the country because it is at these levels that the protection of victims actually should be taking place.

A number of international organizations are involved in the fight against trafficking. What is the OSCE's main contribution?

We are in the useful position of being neutral. In countries such as Moldova, for instance, where several international organizations are engaged in action on the issue, it is felt that we are good co-ordinators and facilitators because we are not competing for funding and don't represent just one government.

Our added value stems from our "bottom-up" relationships. We work directly with governments and assist them to build the structures and mechanisms they need in their fight against human trafficking. We also co-operate closely with international organizations. At the same time, we have close connections with NGOs and grass-roots groups, also through our field operations. Whenever I am invited to visit a country, I make it a point to also meet representatives of NGOs and to familiarize myself with what they're doing and listen to their stories.

You also serve as co-ordinator of all anti-trafficking efforts within the OSCE across its dimensions. How does this work in practice?

As called for in the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings (2003), this Office provides advice and lends its expertise to colleagues in other parts of the OSCE in support of their anti-trafficking initiatives — because obviously the issue goes beyond the human dimension of security.

The OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings assists participating States to implement the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, which was endorsed by the Maastricht Ministerial Council Meeting in 2003. The Office of the Special Representative sets an overall framework for the anti-trafficking efforts of the entire Organization. In providing participating States with recommendations concerning implementation of their anti-trafficking commitments, the Action Plan advocates protecting victims' rights, bringing perpetrators to justice and adopting prevention measures that take human rights into account.



You have devoted a good part of your career to leading anti-trafficking and other human rights-related initiatives. Do you think that solutions are elusive, even though many actors are involved? Has there been progress?

My perspective on this changes all the time. I am learning every day — often about not-so-pleasant things. Criminality is constantly changing. Horrible new ways of exploiting people keep emerging. But I also think that the level of awareness among decision-makers has developed positively. A number of countries are drawing up new legislation, reviewing their structures and increasing their support for NGOs.

Let's not lose sight of the fact that the OSCE's approach is based on the principles of human rights and the goal of protecting the victim, which are not always easy to put into practice. Helping victims alone demands a high level of professional competence, a commitment to long-term support and a willingness for a wide range of actors to co-operate.

And let's be aware that behind many stories of trafficked children and women and men is a long history of exploitation and of society's failure to protect them. Despite this, we know people are remarkably resourceful and resilient and *can* recover from a traumatic experience, especially if they manage to get help early. This is why identifying victims early is crucial.

And we also have to be willing to try new approaches. At a conference on trafficking in children in May this year, we brought together people responsible for the protection of children at the local level. Most of us think that social work at the grass-roots level does not carry any implications beyond the local level, but under international law, countries are obliged to protect every child under their jurisdiction, whether the child is from a village or from a city, and regardless of the child's immigration status. This was the first time local counterparts from both origin and destination countries came together — and now I hope it will be easier for them to work with one another.

What are your hopes and plans for 2009, your third year in office?

I would like to increase the focus on issues concerning prevention, which is one of the most challenging tasks in fighting trafficking because it is about changing behaviour and changing societies. But I would say that my most urgent short-term priority is the work we're doing on national rapporteurs. I hope that a significant number of countries will be able to introduce this mechanism before too long — preferably before I complete my term of office of course! This would represent a major step forward in our anti-trafficking efforts.

Helsinki, 10 September, OSCE Conference on the Successful Prosecution of Human Trafficking. Finnish President Tarja Halonen (centre) with Ambassador Aleksii Harkonen, Head of the OSCE Chairmanship Task Force, and OSCE Special Representative Eva Biaudet.

Photo courtesy of Petri Krook <http://koti.welho.com/petkrook>


In the politico-military dimension for instance, OSCE experts train border personnel to identify fraudulent documents and to distinguish victims of trafficking from criminals engaged in the activity. We also co-operate very closely with our policing colleagues.

In the economic dimension, the emphasis is on empowering women by supporting job creation in areas with a high rate of migration. The OSCE's gender specialists address domestic, gender-based violence that clearly puts people at risk of becoming victims of trafficking.

Our Office also interacts regularly with field staff who specialize in trafficking issues. Together we discuss the projects and priorities that we should help push higher on the host countries' political agendas. I value the support we get from our field staff for our efforts — to promote the creation of national rapporteurs, for example.

“Trafficking in human beings means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000)



Acting against trafficking

Self-directing the theatre of life's hard knocks

Focus on anti-trafficking

Eastern Europe

Moldova

BY JUDITH HALE

Nicon Caraman, aged 22, spends many Saturdays driving several hours on bumpy, zigzag roads. His destinations are schools in the most remote corners of Moldova, usually run-down structures with shattered windows and poor heating — if any — even in the dead of winter. Upon arrival, Nicon finds no welcome mat laid out for him; in fact the reception can be downright frosty. But he is too focused on the job at hand to take it personally. Warming up with a generous dose of tea, which he keeps piping hot in a thermos, he prepares to get into character.

Along with 14 associates, Nicon is a volunteer actor and trainer whose aim is to reach out to young people in rural and isolated parts of the country by bringing the “Forum Theatre” right to their doorstep. This year, the Association of Young Trainers from Moldova, as the group calls itself, has decided to shine a spotlight on the harsh realities of trafficking.

The plot is fictional but realistic at the same time, simple and easy to follow although it deals with complex issues: A young Moldovan is confronted

with a seemingly insurmountable set of problems. Gets into heated argument with parents. Hears about an attractive job offer that sounds like it could be the way out of a desperate situation. Takes a risk. Becomes easy prey for traffickers. Winds up in deep trouble.

The initially sceptical students, ranging in age from early teens to early twenties, stay glued to their uncomfortable chairs through the twists and turns of the story. But — hold on — this is no ordinary theatre; the ending is not quite the ending. Members of the audience get to “rewind” the scenes, go back in time and start with a clean slate.

By exchanging views with the characters, the students start reflecting about how their own goals and values and their concern for their safety and self-respect might influence their choices if they found themselves in a similar dilemma. They discover that they can interrupt the action on stage and say: “Stop, that’s risky! Why don’t you try taking another route instead?”

The second time around, the plot unfolds differently and so does the protagonist’s destiny.

When Ion (not his real name) walked into the cold, makeshift theatre — actually the school gym — he could not resist making fun of the whole event and announcing out loud for all to hear that he would not stay until the end. But then, transfixed by the scene played out in front of him, Ion’s expression changed from cynical to alarmed as

A village school in Calarasi, western Moldova, 11 September. More than 200 students and their teachers watch the unfolding of a scene on human trafficking, after which they can interact with actors and shape the plot.
Photo: OSCE/Dumitru Berzan

Reaching out to vulnerable groups in Moldova. Over the past few months, I have attended many of the performances of the “Forum Theatre” all across Moldova — in Causeni, Criuleni, Calarasi and Dubasari — and I must say that I have never seen such intent-looking young audiences following every move on stage and listening to the dialogue with rapt attention.

These adolescents are the prime target group of our outreach campaign. Their age range, their economic background and their family situation combine to make them among the most vulnerable to trafficking in Moldova today.

As is widely known, Moldova is a major source country for women and girls trafficked for the purpose of exploitation. We hope that when they realize what can happen to their friends and relatives abroad, these young people will behave more responsibly if and when they decide to join the exodus abroad, and that they will think twice about “helping” others to migrate.

Up to around 30 per cent of the work force, or about 750,000 people, are believed to have left this country of four million, either legally or illegally, in search of greener pastures. NGOs believe that more than one per cent of these migrants have been — or will be — trafficked at some point.

And so, when we take the travelling play on human trafficking to schools in the far reaches of the country, including

areas close to or inside Transdnistria, these staggering figures are uppermost in our minds: Close to half of the student population in Moldova has at least one parent who has been absent for months or even years. An estimated 20 per cent of children have both parents living and working abroad.

With parentless households, poor job prospects, and television touting the good life in the West, it is hardly surprising that people are convinced they are making a perfectly rational choice when they decide to remove themselves from their irrational situation. At least 25 per cent of young Moldovan women, for example, experience violence in the home. Victims of domestic abuse are more likely to be trafficked: 90 per cent of identified trafficked victims had experienced violence at home.

Since 2001, more than 2,500 people from Moldova have been identified as victims of trafficking by the International Organization for Migration and its partners. Although the majority of them are women, more and more male victims of exploitation in the labour force have been seeking assistance. Cases of children and minors being trafficked for begging and petty crime are also increasingly coming to light.

Working with more than 25 implementing partners, the OSCE Mission to Moldova has been co-ordinating efforts to combat trafficking, assist victims and improve the efficiency of the prosecution process since 2003. Directly or through its partners, the Mission provides public officials and representatives of civil society with policy, legislative and institutional support.

Veaceslav Balan, Anti-Trafficking and Gender Programme Assistant in the OSCE Mission to Moldova

www.osce.org/moldova



Confronting the harsh realities of human trafficking.

OSCE/DUMITRU BERZAN

Nicon, playing the role of a violent father, raised his hand against his child.

Ion felt compelled to make himself heard once again, this time to seek answers to some concerns troubling him. He proposed wiser choices for the characters and asked them why they behaved the way they did. And he could not resist giving the father some advice on how he could perhaps be a better parent.

“This could easily happen to any of us,” Ion said, turning to the audience. “Let us not break off our

friendships with people who return home from their horrible experiences in a foreign place. That is exactly when they need our love and sympathy the most.”

By year’s end, Nicon and his friends will have presented 20 performances to about 8,000 young people, teachers, social workers and local public officials. “We deliberately seek out schools that we know offer poor-quality education, where students are given few opportunities to broaden their minds,” says Dumitru Berzan, a 26-year-old former professor of German language and literature, who is the driving force behind the Forum Theatre.

He describes some of the challenges that the group has encountered along the way: having to deal with wary school administrators who cancel the event at the last minute, for example, or having to perform in less than ideal spaces such as school corridors and classrooms, and even in a forest.

“Once, a teacher demanded that we stop in the middle of what she felt was an ugly scene,” recounts Dumitru. “We managed somehow to get her to let us continue, and she ended up thanking us profusely. She said she could not have imagined that such a dark narrative could prove so enlightening.”

Dumitru credits some friends for bringing the innovative outreach technique to his attention after discovering it during a stay in Italy. “Social theatre using the ‘psychosocial animation’ method is new to Moldova,” he says. “It works really well in large groups, even in front of an audience of more than 200 people.” The OSCE Mission to Moldova is an enthusiastic supporter and provides generous funding for the miscellaneous expenses of the six-month project.

“We have found the perfect art form that reflects reality,” Dumitru says. “The interactive approach makes the audience more receptive to messages because they are passed on from trainers who are also relatively young. By involving themselves in the plot, students learn what it feels like to go through some wrenching decision-making. They realize that it is within their power to make wise choices for themselves. The hope is that the whole theatre experience will be a deterrent to their having anything to do with the trafficking trade in the future, either as victims or as perpetrators.”

Dumitru never tires of jotting down his observations from each performance and indulging in some self-analysis on how he and his fellow volunteers are also benefiting from their Saturday activity. “In our efforts to make Moldova a better place to live in,” he writes, “we’ve become more open to all sorts of people and circumstances, and this has been good for our personal growth. I can’t think of a more worthwhile way to spend a weekend.”

Judith Hale is the Senior Anti-Trafficking and Gender Adviser to the OSCE Mission to Moldova.

Naked facts

People are not a commodity

BY MILUTIN PETROVIC

Trafficking in human beings is one of the most pressing problems that Serbia is facing today. Because of its complex nature, it is not easy to combat. Unfortunately, we cannot all be like Clint Eastwood who can take care of the bad guy while munching on a sandwich at the same time. However, we can at least try to think of practical and imaginative ways to fight evil.

I believe that individuals like you and me *can* make a difference — but only by joining hands with law enforcement officials, civil society activists and committed organizations. This is why I decided to join the “Naked Facts” campaign of ASTRA, a local NGO that works closely with the OSCE Mission to Serbia to fight trafficking. In fact I felt it was almost my patriotic duty to get involved.

Why “Naked Facts”? In this age of media-hype and shrill marketing, activists need to challenge themselves to learn how to draw the



ASTRA

public’s attention to important social messages. So we decided to compete in this fast-paced multimedia environment by building a campaign around a picture showing naked — or half-naked — men, which is still considered taboo, at least in our part of the world. Alongside this image are these stark words:

Women are not meat.

Children are not slaves.

People are not a commodity.

These are just the naked facts.

I led the creative team that drew up the public service announcement and also directed the radio and television spots. There were no plans for me to be part of the “naked” group. However, after some of the men got cold feet at the last minute, I stepped in as a replacement.

Novi Sad, Serbia, July 2008. One of the many young people at the forefront of the anti-trafficking campaign of the NGO ASTRA does her part at an international music festival.

Disturbing trends in trafficking in Serbia.

The profile of human trafficking in Serbia has been undergoing a transformation over the past eight years. Originally a destination and transit country, today the country has also become a source of victims, most of whom are being trafficked internally.

And while most of the victims identified used to be foreigners, today the overwhelming majority are from Serbia itself. Of 38 people identified as victims by the authorities so far this year, for example, all but five were of Serbian origin.

Trafficking is no longer just for sexual exploitation. Other forms — for forced labour, forced begging and petty crimes, and fixed marriages — are on the rise. Minors younger than 18 make up about half of the victims identified.

Since 2001, the OSCE Mission to Serbia has been spearheading international efforts to combat trafficking in the country by promoting preventative measures, the protection of victims, and the prosecution of perpetrators at both the policy and the practical levels. It works closely with key professional groups in the policing, judicial and social support sectors to improve their capacity to deal with trafficking.

The Mission has served as a bridge between the Government and specialized NGOs, and this has resulted in the forging of a dynamic partnership. This alliance led to the adoption, in December 2006, of a comprehensive national anti-trafficking strategy which the OSCE Mission had helped draft and negotiate.

With the help of the Mission, Serbia became one of the first countries in south-eastern Europe to put in place an institutional structure to identify victims of human trafficking and refer them to specialized support services. The concept is patterned after the national referral mechanisms that have been promoted by the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Today, the official focal point for action to combat trafficking in Serbia is the State Agency for the Co-ordination of the Protection of Human Trafficking Victims, with three specialized NGOs playing a vital role by managing a hotline, running shelters and offering reintegration programmes, among a wide spectrum of services.

Madis Vainomaa, Human Rights Programme Co-ordinator, OSCE Mission to Serbia

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When we launched the campaign and the image was splashed on billboards and posters all over Belgrade, everyone was shocked at its boldness — I would like to think in an exhilarating way. I think we succeeded in teasing people's minds, which we had set out to do in the first place.

I remember coming across a similar campaign by the Swedes a few years ago; from what I recall of the images, a dash of humour was intended. Our concept was different. Although some of my friends could not resist cracking jokes about our picture, they soon realized that it wasn't meant to be funny.

Indeed, most people were rather moved. Several friends said that they considered our participation in the project as an act of courage and chivalry. My family was supportive and proud of my role, both behind the scenes and under the spotlight. This feedback was important to me; I felt that I had set a positive example of civic activism for my growing daughters.

Proof that we had succeeded came when — after bracing ourselves for some critical coverage

in the tabloids, the daily fare of the general Serbian public — the reporting turned out to be actually rather thoughtful and sober.

I do hope that the campaign has a long-term impact among the population in terms of lessening the ignorance about the problem and addressing the deep-seated prejudice against trafficking victims. I believe it is this ignorance and this prejudice that embolden criminals to carry out this inhuman activity. Educating the general public is a concrete, first step to try to do something about it. Without this starting point, the police, the judiciary and other legal and social services cannot do battle with this modern-day evil.

Milutin Petrovic is a Serbian film producer, actor, writer, composer and rock and roll musician. He was the executive producer, editor and actor in "Land of Truth, Love and Freedom", which was named the best film in the former Yugoslavia in 2000 and received wide acclaim at international film festivals.



How an NGO and the OSCE teamed up with an all-male personality line-up to fight trafficking in Serbia



We wanted to do something that was different from anything that had ever been done before, something that would shake people out of their comfort zone. When we got in touch with Milutin Petrovic to let him know we wanted to come up with a short video in connection with our awareness-raising campaign, we felt that he was exactly the

person we were looking for. Apart from being a popular and respected personality in Serbia, he is always bursting with creative ideas.

Nadezda Milenkovic was the creative director of this ambitious campaign. Besides Milutin, who was the film director, six other well-known personalities in Serbia took part in the "notorious" poster: journalists Željko

Bodrožić, Jugoslav Ćosić and Dejan Anastasijević; Ivan Tasovac, director of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra; Vukašin Marković, actor and leader of a popular reggae band; and Branislav Lečić, actor and former Minister of Culture under the late Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić.

I'm sure it was not easy for them to stand in front of photographers

and television cameras and allow themselves to be featured in posters, billboards and television spots — in the buff. But I hope that they realize that thanks to them, the campaign's messages are being sent out loud and clear.

In fact, just recently, I heard an elderly couple in the bus discussing how they had just learned that anybody can be a potential victim of trafficking and that one can call a help hotline 24 hours a day. Right there and then, two myths had been shattered: young women and girls are not the only ones who fall prey to trafficking, and it is not only the police who can help.

In the past six years, ASTRA's awareness raising campaigns, supported by the OSCE Mission to Serbia, have led to an increase in the number of calls to our hotline, which is the only one in the country. As a result, we have been

able to identify and assist some 270 victims so far, including more than 100 children. Equally important, we are also receiving more calls alerting us to suspected cases, enabling us to carry out preventative work.

In the long-run, though, we can only be fully effective if we have a favourable political climate. It will be so much easier for us if the authorities acknowledge that human trafficking is one of the most profitable forms of organized crime and that they will do all they can to tackle it.

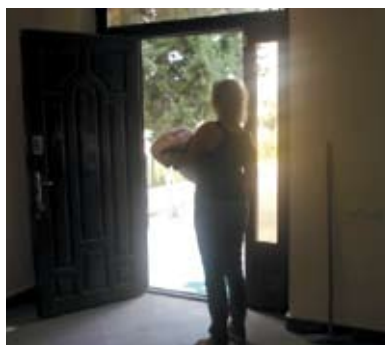
Ivana Radovic, Co-ordinator of the Prevention and Education Programme of ASTRA, an NGO dedicated to eradicating all forms of trafficking in human beings, especially in women and children.

The "Naked Facts" campaign, launched in June 2008, will run until the end of the year: www.astra.org.yu/novi

Sheltering victims

Azerbaijan searches for solutions

Baku, Azerbaijan. After their harrowing experience, trafficking victims feel safe, secure and cared for in their temporary home.
Photos: Baku Shelter/
Mehriben Zeynalova



BY RASHAD HUSEYNOV

“I had nowhere else to turn. All I could think of was how to put an end to my miserable existence,” says Irada (not her real name), 28. “But after coming to this place, I started thinking about tomorrow. Now I know I won’t be alone.”

“This place” is the three-storey Baku Shelter for Victims of Human Trafficking, which the Azerbaijani Government set up in 2006, following the adoption in 2004 of its national anti-trafficking action plan which the OSCE Office in Baku had helped prepare. The shelter is run by the NGO “Clean World” and financed by the State budget.

Irada could never have imagined that her ill fortune — marriage to an alcoholic and subsequent divorce — could take a turn for the worse. “I could not go back to my family because I had gotten married without their consent,” she says. “Then I met an old friend who said she could help me get a job in Dubai as a nanny. She and her brother immediately started getting all my documents ready and before I knew it, I was off to Dubai.”

Irada was in for a rude awakening shortly after landing at the airport of the most populous city in the United Arab Emirates. “I was deprived of all my papers and forced to work as a prostitute.”

A few months later, one of her clients helped her get in touch with law enforcement authorities in her native Azerbaijan who arranged her return home. Personnel of the Department for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, which is part of the Interior Ministry, met Irada at the Baku International Airport and took her to the shelter.

Relieved that she made it back safe and sound,

Irada was still confused about one thing: What was she to do with the baby she was expecting? She was leaning towards having an abortion but after a few days at the shelter, changed her mind when she was assured of free maternity care.

“I now have a reason to go on living,” says Irada.

“This year, apart from Irada, we took two other pregnant women under our wing,” says Mehriben Zeynalova, director of the Shelter. “We have places for 50 victims of human trafficking. We can actually take in men too, but so far all our temporary residents have been women: In 2006, we took in just four, then, in 2007, the number went up to 29. So far this year, we have taken in 38 women.”

The staff have been thoroughly trained in the day-to-day running of the shelter and the proper way of dealing with victims of trafficking. Conducted by experts from Ukraine, the courses were financed and organized by the OSCE Office in Baku in co-operation with the International Organization for Migration. The OSCE Office also provided financial assistance to refurbish the shelter and establish a toll-free hotline for victims.

Access to medical and psychological counselling and to legal assistance is made possible by the Ministries of Education and Health Care. Victims are also helped to reunite with their families — not an easy task since victims are usually held responsible for their plight. The Government also gives victims the equivalent of \$40 when they leave the shelter.

“The humane treatment of victims like Irada is very much at the forefront of our efforts,” says Ms. Zeynalova. “A working group of 11 members from various NGOs closely monitors the way the

New report challenges myths about trafficking in Azerbaijan.

Trafficking in human beings in Azerbaijan is usually associated only with exploitation in prostitution affecting women. Now a recently released report, entitled “Determinants of Labour Exploitation and Trafficking of Nationals and Foreigners in Azerbaijan”, has challenged this narrow view.

“It’s the first-ever report on Azerbaijan focusing on trafficking for labour exploitation and forced labour, which affects mostly men,” says Blanka Hancilova, the report’s lead author. “Interest in this lesser-known area is growing. After all, targeted action against human trafficking is possible only if one understands its different forms.”

The report indicates that exploitation is taking place not only in the sex business, but also in the construction and oil industries and in sectors dealing with agriculture, domestic services, open-air markets, and restaurants and catering.

It discusses Azerbaijan as a destination for potential victims of labour exploitation from such countries as Pakistan, India and China — a relatively new phenomenon stemming from the country’s oil and construction boom.

“No one who has been exploited in areas other than prostitution has yet been able to come forward and seek legal recourse”, says Ms. Hancilova. “This suggests that the legal and judicial system may not even be aware that labour exploitation is an issue. Certainly it shows that there is a lack of both governmental and NGO support for victims of trafficking for labour exploitation, who often happen to be men.

But the report also mentions a few bright spots: a Government-supported shelter for victims of sexual exploitation and a special police department which identified more than 100 trafficked women from Moldova, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan itself in 2007.

The report is part of a long-term project to develop a comprehensive response to trafficking in the South Caucasus which is being implemented by the International Labour Organization in close partnership with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development and the OSCE, with funding from the European Commission (TACIS).

Maryam Haji-Ismayilova, focal point for action to combat trafficking at the OSCE Office in Baku

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shelter is run to ensure that it meets the standards laid down in the national action plan.”

MORE SHELTERS

Visiting the shelter during an official trip to Azerbaijan in June this year, Eva Biaudet, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, welcomed the Interior Ministry’s plan to open four other similar shelters in different regions of the country.

“My general impression is that the Azerbaijani authorities are committed to fighting human trafficking,” she said, after meeting the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, the Minister of the Interior, the Prosecutor General and representatives from the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs.

At the same time, she expressed concern at the low numbers of victims identified — about 100 in 2007 — relative to the scope of the problem. “Experience from other OSCE countries has shown that victims hesitate to turn to the law enforcement authorities for help,” she said. “They do not have enough confidence in the system and



False job advertisements in newspapers promise high wages in Azerbaijan and abroad. A poster of the International Organization for Migration says: “Don’t be fooled! Check it out!”

are concerned that corrupt practices will place them at further risk. This is why we are advocating that the country set up a national referral mechanism to serve as a safe channel through which victims can seek assistance, that will make it easier for them to come forward.”

She called attention to the importance of raising awareness among the public and of giving special training to law enforcers, labour inspectors and health personnel who are likely to deal with victims.

Ms. Biaudet also urged the Government to recognize the crucial role played by NGOs. “More efficient victim identification can take place only through the increased involvement of civil society institutions,” she said.

In 2008, aside from Azerbaijan, Ms. Biaudet and her staff have also visited Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tajikistan, Romania and Spain to assess the efforts of those countries to promote action against trafficking as a national priority and to implement their OSCE commitments.

Jose Luis Herrero, Head of the OSCE Office in Baku, says that the revision of the national action plan by the Interior Ministry serves as an opportunity to address the concerns raised by Eva Biaudet. “In fact, the authorities are open to any assistance that international organizations and NGOs can contribute to the process,” he says. “In the meantime, the OSCE Office will do everything it can to continue building the capacity of the Government, local NGOs and civil society to tackle this challenge.”

Azerbaijan has been primarily a source and transit country for trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labour, but it is fast becoming a destination country for this criminal activity because of its rapid oil-based growth. According to this year’s official estimates, crimes related to human trafficking have increased by more than 50 per cent, with almost 40 criminal groups detained.

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Steering clear of the snares of traffickers

Kayrakkum, northern Tajikistan, 25 July. Left to right: Alisher Alajanov, from the NGO "Golden Goal" in Kyrgyzstan, Shakhnoza Khasanova, a student from Kazakhstan, and Gulchehra Mirzoeva from the NGO "Modar" exchange views at the summer school. Behind them is a sign saying, "Youth for a world free of human trafficking".



BY FIRUZA GULOMASEINOVA

Over ten days in July this year, 60 high school and university students from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, aged 15 to 26, relaxed, made friends, shared experiences, swam in the lake, produced a play and displayed their art work at the "Shifo" camp at Lake Kayrakkum in northern Tajikistan.

Lest this be misconstrued as frivolous holiday fun, courtesy of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, the thread weaving these activities together was a seminar to raise the awareness of young people about one of the most crucial issues of their time: how to avoid becoming "trophies of traffickers".

The summer school sought to instil a sense of personal and social responsibility in the students, enable them to foster networks and absorb as much information as possible to protect themselves from the perils of trafficking. This was the first camp addressing the topic of trafficking in Central Asia.

"Trafficking does not always involve crossing a border, of course," says Graziella Piga, Manager of the Gender and Anti-Trafficking Programme of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan. "However, in this country and in many parts of Central Asia, the trend is for young people to leave their country right after high school, often illegally. Trafficking in minors and children, whether for sex or for labour exploitation, is increasing at an alarming rate."

Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are source countries for trafficked women, while Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan serve as source, transit and destination countries.

Shakhnoza Khasanova, 22, from Kazakhstan agreed that young people like herself belong to the most vulnerable group. "Many of us are lured by images of a beautiful life beyond the borders of our homeland, which make us easy prey for traffickers," Shakhnoza said, "and there is very little information about the risks associated with seeking our fortune abroad."

"I hardly knew anything about the trafficking problem before I joined the summer school," said Sevara Khalmatova, 18, a student at the Kyrgyz-Uzbek University in Osh,

Kyrgyzstan. "Now I'm very well informed. What stuck in my mind is that I should be wary of job offers abroad, no matter how well they pay."

Completion of the summer school does not mean the end of the active involvement of the 60 students.

"We're instilling in these young people the responsibility to pass on their new knowledge to as many of their peers as possible, said Gulchehra Mirzoeva from the NGO "Modar", which helped make the seminar possible. "We're encouraging them to form groups of volunteers, write articles for their local paper, organize seminars at their universities, and spread information through their friends and the Internet."

Daler Juraev, a third-year student at the Khujand branch of the Tajik Technical University, says that he will be assigned to a local school in Istravshan district for his practice-teaching period and plans to devote two or three sessions to human trafficking based on the courses at the summer school.

"It occurred to me that I can take advantage of this useful experience to organize a similar summer school in Kyrgyzstan," said Alisher Alajanov, 26, who represented "Golden Goal", an NGO in Osh that works closely with the OSCE's Field Office in fighting trafficking. He led the five Kyrgyz students who participated in the camp.

The seminar, which the OSCE Office in Tajikistan helped design, support and administer, was organized in co-operation with two NGOs and had the full support of the Government's Inter-Ministerial Commission to Combat Human Trafficking.

The summer school was part of a broader programme including workshops in key cities for young people, teacher training and a series of awareness-raising campaigns. In July, for example, the OSCE Office held an anti-trafficking seminar for the staff of 14 embassies and consulates in Tajikistan responsible for issuing visa and travel documents.

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