

**STATEMENT BY THE OSCE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE
AND CO-ORDINATOR
FOR COMBATING TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS
MS EVA BIAUDET
AT THE VILNIUS CONFERENCE
"PREVENTING TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS: CHALLENGES
AND SOLUTIONS"**

Vilnius, 25 and 26 October 2007

Dear Minister,

Distinguished Ambassadors,

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends,

First of all let me thank the Lithuanian Government and you, Mr. Minister, for supporting the initiative to have such representative forum here in Vilnius and for providing resources to make it happen. We do know that any conference demands substantial efforts from everyone involved in its preparation. This event is a special one – because it reflects the political will of the host country to ensure better future for the people, future which is free from threats to human security and where human dignity, rights and fundamental freedoms of all are respected. It requires compassionate and humanitarian approach from governments and societies.

This conference is also significant because it is a clear demonstration of co-operation between the participating States and national NGOs, on one hand, and the international community, on the other. Our partners in the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons – the UNODC as the co-organizer of this event, Council of Europe (whom I need to congratulate for the recently announced entry into force of the Convention next February), ILO, IOM, UNICEF, Nordic Council of Ministers, Council of Baltic Sea States, and CIS Executive Committee are with

us here today, and this is a solid base for a high-level professional approach and for fruitful discussions. We are particularly happy to greet non-governmental organizations, including Anti-Slavery International, ECPAT and La Strada, which were the ones to ring the bell of alert at times when THB, was not known to the public and not recognized at the State level. .

There is a saying "prevention is better than cure" ("mieux vaut prevenir que guerir"), and this is true – it is the most humane approach but also the justification in social-economic terms is obvious. According to the US experience of counter-trafficking measures, a rescuing operation may require 600 agents, and the preparation for prosecution, including the rehabilitation of the victim so that she or he could be of help in the trial can take up to 2 years.

In a broader sense we can say that two other pillars from the 3 P's also have preventive elements. For example, adequate protection and reintegration of trafficked persons prevents re-trafficking and re-traumatisation. Due and efficient prosecution of perpetrators prevents the "recycling" of the crime and protects potential victims from enslavement. These deliberations may be numerous – they just prove that our approach to combating THB should be integrated and comprehensive. And, let me reiterate, it should be based on a clear understanding of the consequences of steps to be taken each time. For example, it is not enough to rescue a group of victims, sometimes counting up to a hundreds. It is necessary also to know how to care for them as they cannot be put into detention or left at some hotel by themselves. It means that all our service-providers, including NGOs, should be adequately equipped and have human and financial resources to ensure proper treatment of victims.

To prevent the crime – what does it mean in terms of our activities?

It is important but not enough to have a National Action Plan of systemic counter-trafficking. There has to be resources allocated for its implementation and mechanisms to assess its efficiency at the national level. Our Office insists on national ownership of the process of self-monitoring and self-reporting – it is the country itself who is most interested in having the adequate information of the situation.

How can we create an atmosphere of zero tolerance to exploitation, discrimination, violence against the least protected – women and children, - how can we eliminate social hostility towards "others" – migrants, refugees, minorities? We believe that this can be achieved not by pressure or power, but through the education and promotion of human rights values and principles in all social strata. Our main and irreplaceable partner in this endeavour is the media-community. It is the media which has a tremendous impact on the population and policies. It is the media which can search for and provide information, raise awareness, promote compassion towards vulnerable groups of population and empower them with knowledge of their rights. I would like to greet the representatives of media-community who agreed to participate in our conference as active social partners in the fight against trafficking in human beings. We are privileged to have the opportunity to see the results of your efforts and to discuss how to promote this active approach. I believe there is no need to argue that our appeal to the media has nothing to do with any kind of imposing our opinion or suggesting any limitations of freedom of speech in the work of journalists. On the contrary, it is about the essence of journalism telling the truth about what is happening to people in our world.

Can we reach our goals without eradicating the root causes of human trafficking, the demand being one of them? What are the measures to decrease this demand for labour costing less than nothing –or, recognizing the need for cheap labour in general and the role of labour migrants in our economies, to

ensure social protection and labour standards in such areas as construction, agriculture, services of all kinds, home servitude, and others? Are we successful in promoting Codes of Conduct in the private sector and in making exploitation of any kind unprofitable for the business-community? What is our responsibility and how do we react to growing sex business markets, where no limit of exploiting women, boy and girls seem to be there?

The challenges are real, because the incentives of criminals are clear and appealing. Those tens of billions of profits taken away from the productive economy of states with no (or insignificant) perspective of being punished, given the pandemics of corruption and low quality of investigation, failures in criminal money tracing, lack of mechanisms for the confiscation of criminal assets to compensate the trauma suffered by the victims and to contribute to the State anti-trafficking efforts – this is all about money.... We have to admit that organized crime responds to these efforts with all its vigilance, learning from experience and becoming more sophisticated, applying new patterns of crime – more difficult to identify and more hidden. The choice is on us to participate or facilitate the growth of these markets of exploitation in all its forms, or not to, make it less profitable. And if the money, as the incentive, is their choice, ours should be the respect for human rights and human dignity which excludes exploitation of others by all means and in every sphere of life.

We need the efforts from all stakeholders. We need public-private partnership. It may easily become the forth "P" in our counter-trafficking network. The private and non-governmental sector is the natural social partner to the State if we foresee the development of democratic and good governance and enhancing of democratic values. This is the goal to achieve as the turning point in uniting the nations in the fight against slavery. It may takes years – the crime has a long history. We have to accumulate our knowledge, better analyse the data obtained

and base further steps on evidence and real assessments. We have to listen to the voices of victims. We are responsible for the wellbeing and protection of human rights in the OSCE region.

I strongly believe that we will come to justified and well grounded conclusions and recommendations as the result of our sessions during these two days, in addition to all the knowledge we have gained in the OSCE thanks to our co-operation with the participating states and our Alliance partners.

Thank you very much for your attention.