



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

**Speech of Ms. Eva Biaudet,
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at the Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons Conference
Prevention of Modern Slavery:
“An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure”
Vienna, 14 September 2009**

Dear Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I would like to thank Ambassador Marinaki of the OSCE Chairmanship and the Secretary General for their opening remarks. A very special thanks to US Secretary of State, Ms. Clinton for her powerful and engaging video address, and to Ms. Fuller for kindly introducing it. Let me also extend a warm welcome to all our other speakers and participants to this ninth Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons Conference here in Vienna.

In combating trafficking, as with any other human rights violation or crime, it is essential for us to focus on prevention. The conference title quotes the old British adage “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”. While everybody agrees on the importance of preventative efforts, they have arguably been the most challenging of the three P’s of Protection, Prosecution and Prevention.

From my nearly three years as the OSCE Special Representative working full time with these issues, I can clearly say that the international community as well as national governments are putting increasing and more systematic efforts into fighting trafficking. Yet, it is difficult to say that the extent of trafficking in human beings overall has diminished. Successful anti-trafficking efforts do change the patterns of trafficking and can even turn traffickers away from this crime. But as long as plenty of easily accessible markets exist for traffickers in various parts of the world, and until we combine forces more effectively, the overall result of our efforts will be limited.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The global financial crisis has only compounded the already complex problem of trafficking in human beings. Widespread unemployment, a drastic decline in opportunities, and a loss in remittances from labour migrants, result in desperate situations both in countries of origin and of destination, where people are prone to take risks and have few viable alternatives.

In many parts of the world there exist a vast number of people with no sustainable income or livelihood. The lack of options and awareness of risks and realities, and the mere scale of numbers, ensure there will always be plenty of potential victims, despite all our awareness-raising and prevention efforts. With the global financial crisis, this reservoir of desperate people in need is growing in the OSCE region.

Of course, we cannot and should not prevent people from striving for a better life for themselves. What we need to ensure is that people are protected in the process, and not prevented from legally and safely migrating, whether seeking work abroad or in their own country. Therefore, I believe that in the context of preventing trafficking, our efforts have to be more squarely focused on preventing exploitation, rather than on efforts to control migration.

Simultaneously, the increasingly hostile attitudes toward foreigners and declining resources for integration, and assistance to victims of trafficking, further threaten the plight of victims. If we don't tackle discrimination against migrants, particularly women migrants, and their increased exploitation and higher tolerance for this exploitation, these dire effects of the global financial crisis will cast dark shadows on the socio-economic development in our region for decades long after the recession has been turned.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I acknowledge the enormous challenge when discussing concrete prevention actions, especially as it is so difficult to measure the results. How can one best prove what the situation would have been if a specific prevention intervention had not been taken? We will look at some promising practices tomorrow.

Most countries continue to have an incomplete picture of the level and extent of trafficking in human beings. We lack an overall understanding of the scope of the problem, its trends and patterns. Most importantly we need a more accurate assessment of the results of our actions. In the context of our global economic crisis, empirical evidence on the extent of trafficking and the effectiveness of our efforts, is more necessary than ever.

At the same time, and as demonstrated in several countries, the more resources dedicated towards investigating and identifying trafficking, the more is found. Numbers and data are indeed tricky on this complex and hidden crime, but improved knowledge is possible as long as adequate resources and structures are applied.

This is why the establishment of the National Rapporteur or equivalent mechanism is such a crucial step. As you all know, this has been called for already in the EU Hague Declaration, as well as in the OSCE Action Plan and the Council of Europe Convention and reiterated, once again, in the joint statement by the Alliance Expert Team in 2008. I encourage all participating States to establish such a mechanism and to further develop their functions, also by sharing experiences and using lessons learned from other OSCE participating States. I am convinced this will take us to the next level of more effective prevention of human trafficking.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Prevention efforts are challenging and cover a broad range of activities. We must engage in prevention of the root causes and factors in trafficking, before trafficking occurs, but also during each stage of the process: at the point of transit, at the exploitation phase and finally, to prevent re-trafficking.

Traditionally, preventative efforts have mainly focused on potential victims and their communities. The risk for exploitation and trafficking is heightened in areas of general social exclusion. We know from research among identified victims of trafficking that many come from backgrounds of living in institutional care or on the streets, or have experienced ethnic discrimination or gender-based violence.

Generally targeted prevention actions, such as educational campaigns, may help to raise overall public awareness and may influence people's choices. However, it has been shown that campaigns that

specifically aim to target people at risk of becoming victims of trafficking, have proven to be inefficient if they are too broad, as the presumed risk-group may not identify with the campaign. We must therefore recognize the different needs of individual victims, varying contexts, and diverse vulnerable groups and forms of trafficking. It is also important to further study and assess to what extent and how it is possible for people to reduce their own vulnerability, and what could empower them.

Protection can also be a form of prevention. Child protection, specifically, is an obligation of all governments, both national and local, and it is their responsibility to build safer environments which empower rather than exclude populations. We must therefore increase our efforts at the local level (as addressed in our Alliance conference in 2008) to protect the best interest of children especially and ensure sufficient capacity.

Our efforts to stop trafficking would be much more successful if we could effectively target the criminals and the people profiting and benefiting from the exploitation throughout the trafficking chain. The enormous profits drive organized crime. Asset forfeiture would deal a major economic blow to the traffickers and would best prevent them from continuing their business. We need to put more serious efforts into making trafficking less lucrative for the criminals using all the tools at our disposal, including improved cooperation between participating States in fighting this transnational crime. Our conference on Successful Prosecution of Human Trafficking, held in Helsinki last year, showed how targeting the assets of the criminals is also an integral preventative measure.

My Office is currently planning a questionnaire on OSCE participating States' efforts to prevent trafficking. Our aim is to collect this information and analyze it in order to better understand what efforts are currently being taken by you in the OSCE region, and to further our common knowledge and efforts in the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Quite often I hear that the exploitation of human beings in the labour market, or especially in the sex trade, is a fact of life and that it cannot be changed. People tell me we should just focus on harm reduction and stopping the most serious forms of organized crime. Harm reduction is a policy suitable for guarding public order but not applicable when protecting the basic freedom, integrity and the dignity of human beings. Every violation of this kind towards a person is simply unacceptable.

We must therefore address the demand and not just the supply. This has been recognized in many international instruments, including the OSCE Action Plan. It is necessary to address also prevention through legislation. Legislation has a normative role, but also forms public opinion, and thus has a clearly preventative effect. Women's commodification through trafficking is facilitated if local customs and laws treat women as property, but also by the global sex industry, which normalizes the exploitation of people, mostly women and children. Demand has been addressed through legislation in the Nordic countries of Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden, as well as in the United Kingdom.

A perfect market for traffickers is created when a growing demand for ever cheaper labour is combined with little respect for the human dignity of desperate people. We therefore must ensure that the general public is made aware of products and services that are produced by abusive and unfair labour practices.

Other demand-based strategies include developing and implementing codes of conduct whether in the public sector addressing zero tolerance for trafficking related behaviour in the military, corrupt practices by government officials, or by international workers, especially in conflict zones. Codes of conduct are also being introduced in the private sector by companies and businesses, to address child sex tourism, to

prevent exploitation of workers and slavery free products from chocolate to cotton. There are many good and innovative practices being developed, but also many areas where good policies need to be better enforced, and where a climate of zero tolerance still has much room to grow. This is an issue that my Office intends to work on further in the coming year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The media can also play an active role in preventing the facilitation of trafficking through: raising awareness of the reality of victims, humanizing their experiences, helping victims feel that they are not alone, and providing access to reliable information on actual cases. It also helps bring pressure to bear in the formation of government political will to combat trafficking and monitor it, and to report on the work of civil society and the government. It is critical that the media understand their responsibility to cover trafficking appropriately and accurately, not to sensationalize, stigmatize or blame the victim, or to further endanger or victimize the victim.

The media also has another responsibility: to ensure it does not contribute to the business of trafficking. A study from the United Kingdom last year showed that the revenue from ads for “personal services” totaled 44 million pounds annually. A similar study in Finland ten years ago showed a profit of almost 8 million Euros annually. It is important to recognize that by publishing such ads, newspapers may in fact facilitate trafficking and profit from it. Guidelines for media and self-regulation are important, but so is active engagement from those who read, buy and use newspapers or online classified advertisers – for them to question how they can be a platform facilitating trafficking.

Though I have worked on trafficking for many years now, I never cease to be amazed by the cruelty of the traffickers and their complete and utter disregard for the victims’ human rights. The work of filmmakers and photographers can change hearts and minds in this increasingly visual world. I recommend all of you to make use of the possibility to see the vivid documentary by Ric Bienstock, and the touching documentary photographs by Dana Popa, during the lunch break and at the end of the conference today.

Finally,

Be it that international cooperation is necessary to become more effective in prosecuting the criminals, protecting the victims and preventing trafficking, I want to say that this work cannot be outsourced to international organisations. It is the responsibility of every national and local government to create concrete strategies, and to allocate adequate resources for implementation of targeted anti-trafficking efforts as well as their evaluation. I am convinced that such strengthened and sustainable political will, including the already mentioned National Rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms, together with national Coordinators and National Action Plans, are a strong foundation upon which we can together stop trafficking.

Unless we all do our utmost to prevent this modern-day slavery, the trauma – including abuse, indignity, degradation, sexual and other violence, humiliation, stigmatization, and captivity – will continue to live on, foremost in the victims, but will also break our development and confidence in possible political change. Even if it is tempting in times of serious economic difficulties to only focus on the short-term, we cannot give up. The economic downturn does not mean that our obligation to protect the freedom and human dignity of victims of trafficking is any less urgent. Two hundred years ago our forbearers built a political public commitment that abolished the transnational slave trade, clearly against the economic interests of many people in power. Why would it be impossible to do the same today?

I ask us all to consider during these next two days, how we can do better, especially in preventing trafficking in the first place, when tragically, more people are exploited today than in the whole history of the slave trade.

Thank you.