

**HEAD OF PRESENCE REMARKS AT A CROSS BORDER MEETING
ON ANTI-TRAFFICKING ISSUES WITH KOSOVO/UNMIK**

14 October 2011, Tirana International Hotel

Deputy Minister Zajmi,
Deputy Minister Rašić,
Ms. Constant,
Honoured guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Good morning.

On behalf of the OSCE Presence in Albania, I am very pleased to welcome you this morning to this cross-border meeting on the subject of human trafficking.

Let me, first of all, extend my appreciation and thanks to Deputy Minister Iva Zajmi and her team as well as to Deputy Minister Sasha Rašić and to Terre des Hommes Country Delegate Sendrine Constant for their commitment and hard work in organising and contributing to this important event.

I consider it a privilege to be able to share with you a few thoughts on the topic we have come here to discuss – human trafficking and most concerningly – the trafficking of children.

The fight against human trafficking is based on a multi-dimensional and complex approach, as is, to my perception, the phenomenon itself.

The OSCE Presence, in line with OSCE commitments and the 2003 Action Plan on combating human trafficking, fully adheres to an approach that joins together the political, economic, and human dimensions.

Combating trafficking requires good will and combined action on all levels. For this, political will from all sides including the highest levels is of paramount importance.

It is our hope that you will take the fight against human trafficking - and especially child trafficking - to the exactly these highest political and operational levels in your respective institutions and agencies.

The nature of this crime is such that one single combative action alone will not eradicate once and for all the evil scourge of human trafficking.

Indeed, strong co-operation among state stakeholders and civil society is critical to success being achieved.

When looking at how children are exploited and trafficked inside and across borders, we can say that the reality today is dramatic, and even more it is tragic.

We are all aware of numerous examples of children forced into begging in the region and further a field.

Furthermore, this situation leaves children vulnerable also to sexual abuse.

Sadly, child begging is a common sight that we who live in Tirana witness at first hand every day.

Such exploitation, often by their own families, makes their identification as ‘trafficking victims’ especially difficult, and their protection nearly impossible.

So set against this thematic backdrop, the aim of today's event is to discuss ways of enhancing cross-border co-operation on the identification, referral and assistance afforded to children victims of trafficking and potential victims of trafficking.

I believe that a recent study by Terres des Hommes and Save the Children Albania noted that children and their families from the Republic of Albania, migrate north-east of the border mainly for begging or collecting disposed materials.

They face challenging socio-economic situations that only serve to further compound their marginalization, their exclusion, and their deprivation from proper child protection and adequate access to social services.

These children are also exposed to the risk of exploitation by organized crime for sexual and forced labour purposes.

The report calls for better cross-border co-ordination in order to ensure proactive identification, and ensure the best interests of the child.

Can I stress that the identification and social protection of trafficked children is a joint responsibility for countries of origin and destination.

Unfortunately, the trend of unaccompanied children leaving the borders of the Republic of Albania is ongoing.

Of course, it is not easy to establish how many of these children are trafficked.

However, one thing is for sure - they are extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Therefore, it is important that the respective authorities on both sides of the border establish effective systems.

It is important that they stop the return of children before a safe and sustainable living environment has been firmly secured.

Surely all of us here today and those we work alongside in this area have the duty, have the obligation, and have the responsibility to protect these children.

Honoured guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I sincerely hope that the Draft Protocol of Co-operation that will be discussed here today will serve as a strong basis for further co-operation with the ultimate goal of preventing child trafficking and protecting children.

Let me also say that the OSCE Presence will continue to support initiatives that aim at eradicating child exploitation and promote the protection of children's rights.

Thank you and I wish you a successful event.

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