

**STATEMENT BY HER EXCELLENCY MS. SILVIA ESCOBAR,  
AMBASSADOR AT LARGE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, AT THE  
SEVENTH CONFERENCE OF THE ALLIANCE AGAINST  
TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE  
OSCE — ASSISTANCE TO TRAFFICKED PERSONS:  
WE CAN DO BETTER**

Vienna, 10 and 11 September 2007

It is a pleasure for me, as Ambassador at Large for Human Rights and Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, to open this conference of the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons. I should like first to recognize and commend the work of the OSCE, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and, most especially, the Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Ms. Eva Biaudet, not only for convening this conference, but also for her leadership and for promoting a cross-cutting, multidimensional and victim-centred perspective within our organization.

As you know, trafficking in human beings is the third largest criminal activity in the world today and the fastest-growing one after drug trafficking and the illegal arms trade. Trafficked persons are subject not only to sexual exploitation, but also to work-related exploitation in various sectors, including domestic service, construction and agriculture. Nevertheless, most of the victims of this scourge are women and children, since the final destination of many trafficking victims continues to be forced sexual labour. Furthermore, let us not forget that trafficking in human beings is diversified, involving as it does various types of criminal networks, depending on whether they specialize in facilitating illegal immigration, committing offences against workers' rights, engaging in forced prostitution, forging identity or travel documents, or committing fraud in documentation processes.

Since the 1980s, trafficking in persons has spread throughout Europe. European nations are origin, transit and destination countries for trafficked persons, making a mockery of the values and rights that Europe defends and represents. The intersection of poverty, conflict and post-conflict situations, and inequalities between men and women are among other factors contributing to the growth of trafficking in human beings in Europe.

Indeed, we cannot hope to make any lasting and decisive progress in this fight if we focus our activities on a single dimension of the phenomenon, a single form of exploitation or a single region. Similarly, we cannot advance towards completion of our task if we attempt to combat the problem without empirical data and analysis of this criminal phenomenon. Lack of transparency is also a problem. This conference provides a clear opportunity, and the result of the discussions will undoubtedly help us to advance. As the motto of this conference, "we can do better", emphasizes, we must prevent, we must legislate, apply, consult and, above all,

we must remember that our priority must be the victim, assistance to the victim and his or her reintegration. For this reason, it is important that our measures be adopted with the needs and aspirations of the victims in mind.

We must adopt effective measures. Trafficked persons are often reluctant to co-operate with the authorities in investigating the crime and prosecuting traffickers. We must find solutions to this question, since one of the most important issues that we have to overcome is the impunity of the perpetrators. How can we protect people from being trafficked a second time? How can we adopt appropriate solutions for the various categories of victims, men, women and children, who are exploited sexually or through work, or both at the same time, and forced to endure a life of misery and crime? Trafficking in human beings is not only an especially serious offence, it is a most serious violation of human rights.

The OSCE participating States and the Organization in general have sought for many years to provide answers to these questions. Nevertheless, we must admit that much remains to be done. We need ongoing awareness-raising and training campaigns, exchanges and promotion of good practices, legal commitments and obligations in this area, measures to combat corruption, as well as political will, better co-ordination and greater investment. We have to combat this scourge with the same determination with which we counter other grave security threats.

We are meeting here as government representatives and representatives of civil society and international organizations. The role of civil society will never be sufficiently appreciated, as we well know. Our task is to protect the most vulnerable, those who are humiliated, exploited and deprived of their most basic rights. These are difficult, but not impossible challenges. Confronting them successfully is not only a duty, it is a necessity.

International experts of recognized prestige will bring us the results of recent investigations and studies which address, among other things, the issues of child trafficking, victim identification, prevention, the impact of social marginalization, as well as the traumas and needs of trafficked persons. The voices of the victims illustrate the seriousness of the phenomenon as nothing else can.

Spain, as holder of the OSCE Chairmanship, understands that the fight against trafficking in human beings must continue to be a priority for the Organization, both because of the threat trafficking poses to human security and because of the OSCE's own ability to contribute to its eradication. The OSCE can and must make a positive contribution to eradicating trafficking in human beings. This is an item on the agendas of the Permanent Council and the Human Dimension Committee. On 12 September, a Human Dimension Committee meeting devoted solely to the topic of trafficking in human beings will be held. We hope that the Ministerial Council to be held in Madrid will adopt a decision or a declaration on trafficking in human beings. The Spanish Chairmanship stands ready to support participating States in their efforts to find appropriate responses to the challenges posed by the fight against trafficking and smuggling of human beings.

In conclusion, I wish only to express my hope that these two days of discussions will be fruitful and will bring forth ideas that can be useful to us in combating trafficking in human beings effectively, both at the domestic level and in the framework of cross-border co-operation.

Thank you very much for your attention.