

HDIM.NGO/458/08
8 October 2008

Address of the Representative of the CENTER FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES-EASTERN
MEDITERRANEAN UNIVERSITY
Pembe Behçetoğulları
to the 2008 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of the OSCE

Victims of Trafficking: Women in the night clubs

The collapse of communist regimes throughout East/Central Europe and the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s brought severe disruption to the economies of the region. As a result, Turkey experienced a sharp increase in the inflow of women from these areas seeking economic opportunities, many of whom became engaged in commercial sex work. Due to its geographical proximity and close ties to Turkey, North Cyprus has also received a steady flow of such women over the last decade. These women were admitted to North Cyprus on a work permit that explicitly forbids prostitution, yet regulates their life around the assumption that they engage in prostitution. The personal and working life of these women in the night clubs is regulated by a law called “Night Clubs and Similar Establishments Law”. The Law criminalizes prostitution in such a way that victims must perform their labor on the fringes of the law. It binds them in service to a single employer, the alternative being deportation. Furthermore, it renders them vulnerable to abuse by their employers and the local authorities by sequestering their passports and tickets. It isolates them from local society and from other night club workers by dictating where they must live, whom they can and cannot befriend, and under what circumstances they may marry a Turkish Cypriot man.

The research done by individuals, NGOs and research companies show that women working in the night clubs are victims of trafficking in terms of debt bondage, forced labor and violence, and sequestration of the passport. However neither authorities nor the community identify them as the victims of trafficking. As a consequence, exploitation and the human rights violation of trafficked women continue.

Due to the severe consequences mentioned above, there is a pressing need for quality action. The present situation is characterized by:

- absence of human trafficking related legislation,
- lack of human trafficking related administrative structures and
- insufficient capacity of the civil society to devote enough attention to the issue that it deserves.
- lack of cooperation with international bodies enforcing conventions for the protection of victims of trafficking and the suspension of the EU acquis in North Cyprus.

Recently North Cyprus authorities have submitted a new law “Law of human trafficking and smuggling”, identifying victims of trafficking, and penalizing human trafficking. It is approved by the parliament but not in force yet. The new law may help the identification of victims of trafficking but there is a need for quality action and trafficking related administrative structure to inform victims their rights to enable them to get legal assistance and thus access to justice.

Our Center, Center for Women’s Studies, along with its objective of advocating women’s human rights, has been launching series of awareness seminars on women trafficking targeting university students and Women NGOs. We share findings of our research on women trafficking in northern Cyprus and try to create an NGO network which will pressure government and lobby the society for the provision of the fundamental rights of the trafficked women to access justice and compensation.

To realize the tasks mentioned above, especially when the isolation of North Cyprus still continues, the Center needs assistance from OSCE, ODIHR, participating states and NGOs. We will welcome their sharing of expertise and provision of training activities or any assistance in order to contribute to the protection of victims of trafficking in North Cyprus.

Pembe Behçetoğulları, Executive Board Member
Eastern Mediterranean University- Center for Women’s Studies
North Cyprus
8 October 2008