

OSCE Human Dimension Seminar
Rule of Law Framework for Combating Trafficking in Human
Beings

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Opening remarks to be delivered by Ms. Martina Feeney,
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It is an honour to be here today and on behalf of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Ireland's Deputy Prime Minister Éamon Gilmore, to welcome you to this Human Dimension Seminar on the Rule of Law Framework for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

We chose the topic to highlight the fundamental importance of the existence of, and respect for, the rule of law for an effective fight against trafficking in human beings – in prosecution, protection and prevention.

As representative of the Chairperson-in-Office, I want to pay tribute to the role played by ODIHR and by the Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human

Beings. I am honoured this morning to share a platform with both Ambassador Lenarcic and Dr Giammarinaro.

The concept of rule of law is a cornerstone of the OSCE's human rights activities. By it, we understand the principles of: legality, including a transparent, accountable and democratic process for enacting laws; legal certainty; prohibition of arbitrariness; access to justice before independent and impartial courts; respect for human rights; and non-discrimination and equality before the law.

Over the next three days we will address a whole range of key rule of law aspects relevant to combating trafficking in human beings. These include: challenges and good practice with regard to effective legislative frameworks and their implementation; adequate institutional frameworks in the fight against human trafficking; due diligence in the investigation and prosecution of the perpetrators and the protection of the rights of victims during and beyond criminal proceedings; issues of accountability and corruption; prevention of trafficking through addressing the factors that increase vulnerability of groups and individuals to being trafficked, such as violence against women, migrants and minorities and all forms of discrimination; and the accessibility of assistance for those who are exploited or vulnerable to exploitation.

National Referral Mechanisms have proven to be an effective framework for cooperation between state and civil society actors, helping to protect the rights of the victims and bringing the exploiters to justice. For a National Referral Mechanism to be effective, it needs to be inclusive and comprehensive and aim at reaching out to and assisting all those exploited and vulnerable – regardless of their immigration status. I

commend ODIHR's efforts to assist participating States in establishing NRMs that are meaningful and responsive to new developments and challenges, including provision of support and assistance to the victims of trafficking for labour exploitation.

Trafficking in human beings is a serious violation of human rights and therefore a threat to security throughout the OSCE region. The protection of human rights is today unquestionably an important item on the international agenda. In Ireland we have committed to ensuring the full implementation of the OSCE action plan to combat trafficking in human beings. We also had the honour of hosting a country visit by Special Representative Maria Grazia Giammarinaro earlier this year. I am very happy to say that Ireland's National Referral Mechanism is closely modelled on the OSCE handbook and that our policies are very much in line with the OSCE's recommendations in all of these areas.

We cannot become complacent. Self-evidently, the nature of human trafficking is particularly insidious and constant vigilance is required to ensure that it is recognised and tackled in all its facets. It is imperative that State agencies and victim support organisations continue to work together to deal with this issue. Effective collaboration will enable preventative measures to be put in place, victims to be protected and perpetrators apprehended and brought to justice. The OSCE is firmly committed to ensuring those goals continue to be met, even while understanding the difficulties that can arise in achieving convictions where allegations of trafficking are made.

I hope that this seminar will be useful in identifying gaps and areas where further action is desirable. This valuable work should continue in close

co-operation and coordination with other actors, such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the OECD, the Council of Europe and the European Union. I am delighted to see that many of the international organisations that work closely with the OSCE are represented here today. and I look forward to stimulating and productive discussions over the next few days.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to the Government of Poland for their generous hospitality