

**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR. FIDEL LOPEZ ALVAREZ,
AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF SPAIN TO THE
REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA, AT THE VILNIUS CONFERENCE
"PREVENTING TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS:
'CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS'"**

Vilnius, 25 and 26 October 2007

Dear Minister,
Dear Special Representative,
Distinguished colleagues and friends,

It is a pleasure for me, as Ambassador to Lithuania and Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, to address this conference and to convey best wishes to you all on behalf of the Chairmanship. In our opinion, this is an excellent example of true co-operation between the Organization and the host country which has clearly demonstrated its dedication to our common cause and its positive, contributing approach to the OSCE as such. In this regard let me commend the Office of the Special Representative for this initiative and to warmly greet Ms. Eva Biaudet, and express our appreciation of her leadership and efforts to promote a cross-cutting, multidimensional and victim-centred perspective within our organization and among the participating States.

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, bringing tens of billions dollar profits annually to its perpetrators. Trafficked persons are subject not only to severe sexual exploitation, but also to labour exploitation in various sectors, including domestic service, construction, agriculture, food-processing, hotel and travel business, and even in such criminal fields as organized begging. It is modern human tragedy of hundreds of thousands, if not millions – of those enslaved and humiliated, whose basic human rights are violated in the most cynical and cruel way. It is the shame of the XXI century.

We have to admit that our efforts to reach a turning point in the eradication of modern slavery are far from being satisfactory. The criminal world has no borders, no linguistic problems of communication, no limits in terms of resources, no bureaucracy, and no deficit of supply. Women, men and children, of all ethnicities, all nationalities, in the East and in the West, those deprived of equal opportunities, marginalized, jobless, being in a conflict or post-conflict situation, refugees, and migrant workers, victims of gender discrimination and violence, and many, many others fall into the trap of false promises, are deceived, threatened, abused and, finally, exploited, sometimes to the extent inconsistent with human life.

Just a tip of an iceberg –that is what we know about real numbers of trafficked persons. Even fewer cases reach the stage of prosecution and punishment. This is the challenge we face in all participating States. What can we do together to prevent human trafficking, to eliminate its root causes, to create conditions hostile to the criminals and to exploitation of human beings resulting from trafficking?

Any society, in order to meet this challenge, has to be fully aware of its threat to human development and its impact on human security. Any society has to recognize that indifference towards this grave crime which entails violation of human rights and freedoms contributes to its impunity. That we cannot afford this "luxury" - to pretend we are deaf and blind to the instances of crime committed next door. Losses, in terms of democratic values, rule of law, good governance, and economic stability are too dramatic to be underestimated or ignored. We have to create a special climate of intolerance to exploitation and discrimination in the participating States, and to achieve it we need partnership with all social stakeholders, the media and business community being at the forefront in the prevention of THB from further spreading.

This conference provides a clear opportunity to establish such partnership, and the result of the discussions will undoubtedly help us to advance. As the motto of this conference, "challenges and solutions", emphasizes, we must identify most urgent, priority tasks and together come to an agreement upon most efficient ways and means to confront this threat imposed on us by organized transnational criminal networks. Let me remind the participants that the priority of all our efforts is the victim (potential and actual), prevention of the crime to be committed and assistance to the victim – if the crime has occurred. For this reason, it is important that all our measures be adopted with the needs and aspirations of the victims in mind.

We must find solutions to lots of questions, starting from poverty reduction and educational and employment opportunities to proactive investigation and breaking up criminal networks in the cradle. We have to protect people from being trafficked a second time. We have to find appropriate solutions for the various categories of vulnerable categories of men, women and children, who may easily become the victims of THB to be exploited sexually or through work, or both at the same time, and forced to endure a life of misery and crime. We have to remember that trafficking in human beings is not only an especially serious offence; it is a most serious violation of human rights.

Let me underline that here in Vilnius we are benefiting from the broad representation of government representatives and representatives of civil society and international organizations. Let us use this opportunity to enhance our cooperation and exchange of experience and best practices to strengthen our anti-trafficking capacity. We believe that the results of our discussions, open and sincere, will lead us to forward. Every potential victim rescued from falling into this trap would be our joint victory.

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 preventing THB from further increase and eradicating it as a criminal phenomenon in the OSCE region. We hope that the Ministerial Council to be held in Madrid will adopt a decision that would symbolize a new level of our commitment. 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 in human beings.

In conclusion, let me wish you full success to be achieved during these two days of discussions and in your future endeavours back home.

Thank you very much for your attention.