



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

**Presentation by Eva Biaudet
Special Representative and
Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings
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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues and Friends,

It is with a deep appreciation and also with some sadness that I address you all today to present to you my report on achievements and challenges in combating human trafficking in the OSCE region.

My appreciation goes to all of you for the continuous support I have received in my work. It is the participating States that make - or break - the OSCE. I feel that the fight against trafficking in human beings is an issue that is very much at the core of the OSCE. Trafficking is a crime that transcends national boundaries, threatens societal security and well-being and violates the fundamental freedoms and human rights. In my view, the work to eradicate the modern slavery of the 21st century describes the work of OSCE at its best, working to strengthen peace, security and justice for all.

I also want to thank the Greek Chairmanship, as well as the Belgian, Spanish and Finnish chairmanships of 2006-2008 for their active engagement in combating trafficking in human beings. My sincerest thanks also go to the Secretary General, the OSCE executive structures, ODIHR, and the devoted personnel working on human trafficking in our field operations for their support and encouragement. My biggest thanks I would like to extend to all my staff for their expertise, professionalism and dedication.

At the same time, it saddens me that this is the last time I am addressing the Permanent Council in the capacity of the Special Representative. These three years have been extremely interesting and very fulfilling. It has been a time of hard work and fruitful engagement. Still, I am pleased to know that there is a legacy that will go on and that the work will continue. I may be leaving, but the strong and devoted team of professionals of the Office will remain here at your disposal. I know they will continue to work relentlessly towards eradicating trafficking in human beings, together with you all.

It is reassuring to know that my successor will receive the same strong support from you all as I have felt. I wish my successor all the best in this important work.

My Annual Report, which was distributed to you last week, outlines the activities of my Office this past year, some of the achievements over the past three years as well as discusses remaining challenges in the work to eradicate trafficking. In my speech today, I would like to reflect on the political priorities of the fight against trafficking and look back at the work the Organization has done.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is not an exaggeration to say that OSCE has become a forerunner and a centre of excellence in fighting trafficking in human beings. OSCE's advantage is its comprehensive approach to security, which includes action against trafficking at both the operational and political levels.

At the operational level, OSCE's anti-trafficking work **first of all** brings increased knowledge to participating States, so as to help them create enhanced solutions to tackling trafficking. We have engaged in this through organizing well-attended conferences, through publishing papers and research, including the Occasional Papers, as well as through direct assistance, training and co-operation with participating States. **Secondly**, we promote long-term strategies and structures to tackle trafficking, including the establishment of National Rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms and call for the allocation of adequate resources. We have engaged with actors at the national and international level to facilitate exchanges of experiences and practices and to help establish such functions nationally. **Thirdly**, our work strengthens international partnerships in prevention, protection and prosecution of human trafficking, all the way from international actors to grass-roots organizations and activists, so as to create joint approaches to this crime. The Alliance against Trafficking in Persons is a major achievement in this regard, and provides a unique forum for co-operation with the main international actors and organizations.

At the political level, OSCE has been an important vanguard in highlighting trafficking and elevating it as a political priority of the 56 participating States. The OSCE has created a discourse on trafficking that is helping countries take steps to strengthen their policies and legal norms against trafficking. The OSCE has contributed to establishing standards to combat trafficking. As an example, most of the provisions of the OSCE Action Plan of 2003 are reflected in the subsequent Council of Europe Convention on action against trafficking in human beings. Similarly, the National Referral Mechanism, promoted by the OSCE, has become an international standard, referred to also in the Council of Europe Convention and the EU Action Plan. OSCE has played a crucial role in making the work against trafficking in human beings a recognized global problem. The Ministerial Council Decisions on human trafficking have carried the Special Representative forward and have been the backbone of our work.

I have never believed that Ministerial Council Decisions should be taken for the sake of creating more decisions. Instead, they should be taken on the basis of evidence-based proof of the need for additional action to fight human trafficking and of an understanding of the significance of the problem. Trafficking in human beings is a serious security and human rights threat, and this was also repeatedly pointed out by many ministers last week. I regret that the proposed Ministerial Council Decision on *Strengthening OSCE Efforts to Prevent Trafficking in Human Beings* was not taken at the Ministerial Council meeting last week.

However, the absence of a decision on combating trafficking in human beings in 2009 does not mean that our work to fight this crime will stop or slow down. There is no such alternative. There simply is no such zero-scenario of inaction. Organized crime is constantly a step ahead of us and will use every opportunity to take advantage of any delay in our responses. My Office and the OSCE structures are well equipped to provide assistance to participating States in promoting advanced and proven methods to prevent this crime and ensure adequate protection to its victims.

The previous OSCE commitments on action against trafficking in human beings do exist and together with the other international obligations continue to provide the framework for our work. In addition,

the new Ministerial Council Decisions on *Further OSCE efforts to address transnational threats and challenges to security and stability* as well as on *Enhancing OSCE efforts to ensure Roma and Sinti sustainable integration* address human trafficking as an international security threat and as an issue of discrimination and marginalization. I welcome both decisions as well as the *Decision on Migration management*, which specifically refers to our joint efforts with the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities and the Gender Section on gender-sensitive migration policies.

The Decision on *Women's participation in political and public life* is also important, as it addresses the fact that we need to ensure that both men and women are entitled to the same number of seats in elected bodies and the same strength of voice, as well as equal and real access to political representation, also at the highest levels. I could not help but notice that there were only three women ministers represented at the Ministerial meeting in Athens. Research examining more than a hundred years of women's full political rights in Finland shows that more women in political decision-making whatever the political background, strengthens the social development agenda, which particularly enhance choices and freedoms of women and families. This means better policies aiming at sustainable social development, social inclusion and social cohesion. These issues are particularly relevant also in the fight against human trafficking, especially in prevention and protection efforts.

I am convinced there can be added value in renewed and strengthened commitments on human trafficking and I am pleased that the incoming Kazakh Chairmanship has announced that combating human trafficking, especially child trafficking, will be one of their priorities. To facilitate the discussions on this topic, perhaps it could also be useful for delegations to engage during the year in order to discuss trafficking. My Office will be ready to support this discussion.

Another opportunity would be to use the Permanent Council agenda point on Current Affairs to raise individual cases and significant news related to human trafficking for discussion. This would strengthen the OSCE human rights approach where trafficking is addressed as a serious violation against the life and security of individuals and our societies. Recent events again show us that the reality is more complex than we perhaps can imagine and cases may concern also countries outside the traditional classification of country of origin, transit and destination. The criminal activities might very well be organized from yet another country. Why not use the OSCE Permanent Council potential as common platform in order to address this transnational security threat on time?

Dear Ambassadors,

Your role is crucial in advancing the work against human trafficking. You have the challenging role of exporting the OSCE ideas and way of thinking to your capitals in order to advance the common international agenda. To quote Ms. Madeleine Albright, "A great task has been completed and an even larger one remains". I hope all of you will continue to keep trafficking high on the political agenda of OSCE and your countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The position of the Special Representative is unique. It is a high-level position dedicated solely to fighting human trafficking. It provides a high-level instrument through which dialogue can be promoted with decision makers and policymakers in OSCE participating States, as well as facilitating concrete co-operation and sharing of information.

The Special Representative has been well received in all OSCE participating States and the fact that I have been able to meet ministers, parliamentarians, government officials and representatives of civil society has given voice not only to anti-trafficking efforts, but to the whole of the OSCE and its mission. I therefore believe that the good reception of the Special Representative shows a strong recognition that trafficking affects all participating States and an acknowledgement that more efforts are needed everywhere to address this crime.

We also receive a magnitude of information from the field. There is a strong link between us and the OSCE field missions and our exchange of information is very good. The OSCE anti-trafficking Focal Point Meetings have proven very useful in this regard. The work of ODIHR, especially with regard to improving identification, assistance to and access to justice for victims, has been valuable to us.

However, the core budget of OSCE focusing on efforts to combat trafficking in human beings is rather modest. There is indeed enough to do. I therefore call upon participating States to continue supporting the anti-trafficking work of the OSCE structures and field missions also financially.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

According to recent research by the International Labour Organization, the total cost of coercion for victims of forced labour amounts to almost 21 billion US dollars¹, including lost salaries and costs of recruitment. Furthermore, research by Siddharta Kara² estimates that in Europe, the annual profit per person trafficked and exploited for sexual slavery is over 53,000 euro. This is more than the per capita gross domestic product of all but a few OSCE participating States. Trafficking is a very profitable crime, especially since the risks involved are low. In all of Europe, the number of criminal proceedings for the crime of trafficking has been decreasing in recent years.³ The low number of convictions for traffickers almost guarantees that criminals can, in fact, continue to commit the crime with impunity.

I never cease to be amazed at the ingenuity of traffickers and exploiters. During my three years as Special Representative, I have encountered too many shocking cases of exploitation and violence, all caused by vulnerability on one hand and human greed on the other.

Sexual exploitation still continues to be the most commonly identified form of trafficking, including in the OSCE region. There are also more children being sexually exploited, including boys. Trafficking of children does not always incorporate the crossing of borders, as in many countries children are trafficked for sexual exploitation domestically, and online, via the internet. Children are also trafficked for domestic servitude, living in appalling conditions and hidden away in domestic households.

The global financial crisis has clearly affected the demand as well as the supply side of trafficking. There is more desperation, and many are willing to accept almost anything as long as they have some work. People are willing to work despite poor conditions with the simple hope of receiving some payment in the end. Their desperation is easily exploited by criminal businesses which see an opportunity to profit by eliminating all costs of labour. For traffickers it continues to be a lucrative

¹ *The Cost of Coercion. Global report undee the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, Report of the Director-General, International Labour Conference, 98th Session 2009, Report I (B), Geneva: ILO, 2009.

² Siddharta Kara. *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*, Columbia University Press: New York, 2009.

³ *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. UN.GIFT*, UNODC, 2009, p. 37.

business with little risks, as there is an abundance of labour waiting to take any chance to work they can get, as well as scarce prosecutions and sentences for the traffickers, let alone asset seizures.

It is clear that we must step up our efforts to fight this crime. Albert Einstein once said that “problems cannot be solved at the same level of awareness that created them”. It is important that we think outside the box in finding solutions. While there are many encouraging signs that countries are taking enhanced efforts to fight trafficking, many of the responses are too ad-hoc. There are too many projects instead of sustainable, long-term approaches. Many countries also seem to think that one can escape the costs of investing in fighting trafficking. Unfortunately, the crime will not diminish unless we invest in combating it. Instead, the human and the societal costs will increase. Fighting human trafficking is the cheapest option for governments

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to highlight three specific areas, where more attention is needed.

Protecting children from exploitation and trafficking is our first priority. Actions that benefit children usually benefit all. A strong child protection framework is also key to preventing trafficking. The disappearing of children who arrive as unaccompanied asylum seekers cannot be ignored. The current Dublin procedure practice of the European Union should therefore be seriously reconsidered in the case of children, so as to prevent children from falling prey to traffickers, and to prevent them from being re-trafficked during their return process. In any case, the optimal, most safe and sustainable solution is always the one that best serves the interest of the child.

Better identification of victims will require a more humane attitude. We are inclined to distrust the victim’s account. Sometimes there is too much cynicism towards the victim, even where child victims are concerned. The prevailing culture of disbelief, even among professionals specialized in assisting presumed victims, creates a high threshold to any action to protect and support victims. The challenge is that all presumed victims of trafficking must have access to victim assistance and support even before there is a conviction on human trafficking in court. Most importantly, assistance must be given to presumed victims, even without knowing whether the victim is capable of or willing to assist in criminal proceedings. Basic protection cannot only be reserved for the most evident forms of trafficking. All presumed victims are entitled to assistance.

More resources into investigating human trafficking and related crimes will help us catch up with the traffickers. This calls for more effectively targeted resources. This was recently highlighted also by the director of Europol. It is important to compare the resources used for fighting trafficking in human beings with the resources used for fighting other serious crimes. If we are to truly eradicate trafficking, we need additional funding.

To conclude,

Today on December 10 we celebrate Human Rights Day and 61 years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Articles 4 and 5 of the Declaration state that “no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.” and “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”.

61 years later we are still reminded that this issue is more pressing than ever before. Trafficking in human beings is a grave violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. We cannot neglect our international obligations to protect and uphold the human rights of the victims of this crime and our obligations towards them.

It is not the time to give in. We have seen little evidence that the scope of this modern-day slavery is diminishing. Still, every rescued person counts and is a victory. Every prevented crime is a success and means that the human rights and freedom of individuals are protected and the lives of girls, boys, men and women saved.

Eradicating trafficking may seem like an impossible goal. The task may indeed seem daunting, but as the old Chinese proverb says, “a journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step”. I urge you all to continue taking those steps towards a world free from trafficking.

Thank you.