



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

*Special Representative
on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings*

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY!

Thailand Conference

On Sharing of Experiences in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

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To start with, I should like to thank the organisers for hosting this joint Conference of the Thai Government and the OSCE. It is an honour, indeed, for me to address this audience in my capacity as Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of the OSCE. This Workshop can certainly be seen as a follow-up to a joint conference, held a couple of years ago here in Bangkok, on the same pressing issue of combating trafficking in human beings, and it fits into a wide range of regional, sub-regional, national and international meetings held in your country, in which these or related problems – such as migration and organised crime issues – have been addressed.

The OSCE – with its 55 participating States - is the largest regional organisation encompassing all Western European countries, reaching out to Trans-Atlantic partners, such as the US and Canada, extending to the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Caucasus and Central Asian countries on to our Mediterranean and Asian partners for cooperation.

In recent years, human trafficking has become one of the most globalized criminal businesses worldwide – one that no country is immune from. And it has taken on an added dimension in this area of globalization with some of its disruptive effects like weak economies and few job opportunities in many

countries. As the remit of the OSCE covers countries of origin, transit and destination of human trafficking, it is well placed to tackle the problem in its complexity, a problem which is mainly (though not exclusively) a transnational one, and to help disrupt the trafficking chain.

The OSCE has also the capability to interact with the various players and stakeholders and to provide guidance on anti-trafficking management through its existing structures and institutions (ODIHR, SPMU, OCEEA, the Gender Unit, field missions and presences, ATAU) and through cooperation with other international and intergovernmental organisations and agencies.

Considering the cardinal importance of cooperation and coordination in a successful fight against trafficking in persons, and bearing in mind that no country, no institution, no ministry nor agency on its own will be able to successfully cope with this problem, I have launched the ‘Alliance against Trafficking in Persons’ with a view to streamlining the approaches to all the dimensions of human trafficking – from trafficking for sexual exploitation, via trafficking for forced marriages, including trafficking in children, to trafficking into domestic servitude and other forms of trafficking for forced and bonded labour, and involving all the relevant actors from governments, to law enforcement, the judiciary, to the NGOs as the main service-providers for victims of trafficking. I consider it one of my priority tasks to help set up concrete mechanisms for national and transnational cooperation.

Let me repeat how much I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this complex problem of human trafficking with you here today, as I believe that we are at a crossroads in our efforts to contain human trafficking in Europe and beyond.

If we take the unveiling of the UN Protocol against Trafficking in Persons as the starting point of the modern era of confronting human trafficking, trafficking has now received concerted international attention for some 5 years.

A growing number of states have reformed their legislation or are preparing to amend their national laws in order to take account of the main dimensions of human trafficking. More and more governments, organisations and individuals have dedicated increasing attention to this problem. Human trafficking is at the political agendas of almost all the OSCE participating States and our partners for cooperation. (National plans of action are being developed, national coordination mechanisms set up with national governmental coordinators etc.). One has come to realize that effective action against human trafficking is going to require comprehensive and integrated approaches. It is now realized that interventions must address root causes, we must understand demand as well as supply factors, raise awareness of the risks of human trafficking, develop adequate assistance and protection measures for the victims, monitor recruitment and transporting systems, and also monitor conditions in the destination countries.

But, we have also come to realize that – in order to be successful in our joint endeavour to diminish or even better: to eradicate human trafficking - the key challenge for countries around the world is to craft and implement sounder and more effective responses that produce meaningful results. We also know that a more sophisticated understanding of human trafficking is needed to improve the operational effectiveness of the implementation of appropriate anti-trafficking laws, policies and practices utilized in the fight against trafficking in human beings around the world.

So what we need to do, first and foremost, is to deliver the message that human trafficking is about the plight and suffering of human beings and not simply about criminal transactions in soulless goods.

To assist and protect victims of trafficking - as it would anyway be the duty of states and governments under the international human-rights norms - is not only called for from the human-rights perspective, but would also be a major contribution to curbing this crime. Once they and their closest relatives are safe and secure, trafficking victims will be more inclined to support the prosecution of traffickers and to help dismantle their criminal networks.

Furthermore, it is indispensable to raise awareness of the fact that trafficking in persons is both a law enforcement issue and a human rights concern, and that it is not a question of either – or. Both issues must be tackled together, if we wish to be successful in our struggle against human trafficking.

Governments very often see the battle against illegal (im)migration as their first priority. This is also the reason why human trafficking is constantly confused with human smuggling. Smuggling is illegal border crossing – human trafficking, however, involves the ongoing exploitation of people who are deprived of their freedom and forced into slavery-like situations, from which they can hardly escape and from which criminals and often corrupt accomplices derive their immense profits.

We certainly all know that the push factors which force people to leave their countries are closely connected with the pull factors of the countries of destination. And, where the desperate need for work meets the pull of the cheap, unprotected or illegal labour market, the traffickers and their accomplices are the link between demand and the exploited people who can satisfy it.

Therefore, strengthening cooperation between countries of origin and countries of destination is a must. Human trafficking concerns by no means only countries of origin, much rather it affects us all equally – in East and West alike, in Europe and in other parts of World – as countries of origin, transit or destination – and very often as a mix of all three. So, one of the main priorities will have to be the development of mechanisms that will allow to address the whole criminal network from the beginning in the countries of origin to the end users in the countries of destination.

There is certainly much more to be said about this complex problem of human trafficking and I do hope that this forum will look in depth at its various aspects and contribute to a deeper insight into its ramifications. If we succeed in pooling all our forces we may be able to throw trafficking victims a life line and demonstrate to the traffickers and their accomplices that we are serious about dismantling their criminal networks.

By way of conclusion I should like to reiterate that, if we wish to diminish human trafficking, there is equal need for short-term and long-term measures. On the one hand, the counter-measures have to be quick-acting. On the other hand, it is necessary to raise and address the issue of the structural roots of human trafficking – namely, the global inequalities in the distribution of jobs, resources and wealth. We have no alternative but to engage with the root causes, no matter how complex, difficult and forbidding they may be. Anti-trafficking initiatives must offer real prospects of escaping from the cycle of poverty, abuse and exploitation.

What is of paramount importance in all this is the political will to vigorously tackle this problem.