

*Special Representative
on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings**Helga Konrad***PC Statement****17 March 2005**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to update you on some of the areas of emphasis I am dealing with - supported by the Anti-trafficking Assistance Unit - in our joint fight against trafficking in human beings.

Meanwhile it has almost become a cliché that human trafficking is a very complex problem, and it is certainly up to all of us to exercise the leadership required to ensure that effective measures against it are taken without delay and that trafficking in persons is addressed as a serious crime, distinct from alien smuggling and illegal migration.

A truly comprehensive and multi-pronged approach is called for, if we wish to be successful in combating this scourge – bringing together those who work in poverty reduction, education, human rights protection as well as those who address issues of corruption, organised crime, immigration and legal reform.

Just as we must understand that no country, ministry nor organisation or agency can single-handedly put a stop to this horrendous violation of human rights, we must understand that no single approach will put an end to it.

This is why we keep calling upon governments and all those responsible on the spot to adopt anti-trafficking measures that are both diverse and comprehensive, addressing root causes as well as criminal manifestations, providing for

stringent punishment of the perpetrators which reflects the severity of the crime and, in particular, responding to the needs of the trafficked persons.

The assistance and protection of victims of trafficking deserve special attention in the fight against human trafficking. It is a central point which is still largely neglected, out of the fear of misuse. To assist and protect victims – as it would anyway be the duty of states and governments under 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 the victims and their closest relatives are safe and secure, they will be more inclined to support the prosecution of traffickers and to help dismantle their networks.

Although in recent years things have slightly changed for the better, and despite increased attention at the political level, victims of trafficking are still frequently seen as perpetrators, and are criminalised. Instead of being taken to appropriate shelters, they are still often put into custody in the receiving countries and/or immediately returned to their home countries. What is currently offered is very often human-rights insensitive and not what victims really need.

These issues were addressed in three workshops and, a couple of weeks ago, in a meeting of national and international experts under the aegis of the “Alliance against Trafficking in Persons”. The practice-oriented position paper drafted by the ATAU together with international experts may serve as a useful tool in implementing effective assistance and protection measures.

“Alliance against Trafficking in Persons” is the motto chosen by the Special Representative for the joint efforts to combat human trafficking undertaken together with major international actors. It takes account of the complexity of

the problem and complements existing coordination efforts among the OSCE and other international and inter-governmental organisations, such as the Council of Europe. The “Alliance” is a forum for discussing appropriate responses to the individual links in the human trafficking chain and to the problem as a whole.

A specially serious dimension of trafficking – trafficking in children – will be dealt with in the high-level conference starting tomorrow. We all know that child trafficking – for sexual exploitation, for forced labour, for various criminal activities, for adoption or organ replacement – is cause for special concern and presents particular challenges.

The conference was convened to stimulate deeper reflection and coordinated action in dealing with the problem at issue and to establish a dialogue with and among the OSCE participating States on how to prevent child trafficking and on how to address the special assistance and protection needs of children. The conference may also help prepare the ground for the formulation of the addendum on combating child trafficking - the addendum to the OSCE Anti-trafficking Action Plan - with which the OSCE participating States were tasked by the Sofia Ministerial Council, last year.

Let me warmly invite you to join the high-level representatives from your capitals at tomorrow’s conference.