



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

**Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons Conference, Vienna, 26-27 May 2008  
Child Trafficking: Responses and Challenges at Local Level**

**Opening speech by Ms. Astrid Thors, Finland's Minister of Migration and European Affairs**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is a great pleasure for me to be here today to represent the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship. While we may all agree that it is not always easy to set priorities among various important themes the OSCE is tackling, let me assure you that it was not that difficult to determine the fight against trafficking to be one of the three priority themes under the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship. The other two themes are gender mainstreaming, and tolerance and non-discrimination issues, including the situation of the Roma in particular.
- Indeed, it is human trafficking where our tolerance simply vanishes. Passive acceptance and silence about trafficking cannot be tolerated either as several elements of human rights violations are embedded in the phenomenon of trafficking. We cannot allow compromises on human dignity and that is from where the human rights-based approach derives. States need to live up to their responsibility to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- I would like to emphasize that trafficking is a very cross-dimensional issue within the OSCE work. It would be questionable to deny its links to the economic environment or the politico-military dimensions of the OSCE. A comprehensive and holistic approach to trafficking enables us to see better the complexity of the phenomenon and the fight against it, including the sometimes complex combination of root causes we need to eliminate.

- We have gathered together in this Alliance Conference in order to further strengthen and enhance our joint efforts in the fight against human trafficking. I encourage particular openness from all of us in our exchange of views. Mutual learning and sharing is already in itself a step forward in itself. And even more concretely so, when words are translated into action at national and local levels.
- In practice various challenges exist in the implementation side. While we try to make sure the sufficient political will is created among and within the participating states, what counts at the practical level is the allocation of sufficient resources in order to ensure effective measures.
- As the focus of this Alliance is on child trafficking, our points of departure are the rights and the best interest of the child. Children should not be treated as adults in miniature and their special vulnerability to trafficking deserves the most serious attention. Indeed, there is no lack of OSCE commitments to protect children from trafficking. This set of commitments, prepared for tomorrow's Human Dimension Committee discussion, is impressive as such. We have the Action Plan, its appendix, several ministerial-level decisions and so on. But now it is time to address what actually happens at the grassroots, how child-sensitive and friendly the reality is, and how and if tailor-made responses for children work. I am eager to learn from genuine local-level experiences, including the important aspect of coordination and cooperation between different local authorities.
- I would like to give a few examples from Finland. As such, our legislation - the Penal Code, the Aliens Act and the Integration Act - forms a solid foundation for an effective fight against trafficking. In regard to child victims, child

welfare legislation provides further means to support and protect them. The legislative framework was complemented by a national action plan against trafficking in 2005 and, currently, the Government is discussing a proposal for an updated national action plan against trafficking. This updated plan introduces several new measures to combat trafficking. In implementing all these measures, special attention will be paid to the best interests and needs of child victims. In addition, the new plan includes a section dedicated to detailed services for underage victims. All in all, we have a comprehensive set of measures in Finland ranging from identification of trafficked children to their safe return and a secure environment to grow up in.

- When protecting child victims, the major risks and needs relate to the safety of children and attempts made by the criminals to exploit them again. Even when child victims are in the care of the authorities, the modern information technology can be used by the criminals to keep contact with the children. In these cases the children may be placed in special care or under control to protect them from the criminals. These measures require the authorities to balance the best interests of the child against his or her other rights, such as freedom of movement and right to private correspondence.
- Indeed, child victims are particularly vulnerable to revictimisation. In Finland, multi-professional cooperation between different actors has proved to be essential, particularly in preventing revictimisation of minors in transit. Additional benefits have been gained by including NGOs and the private sector and their expertise in this cooperation.
- I would like to further stress the important role of NGOs in combating trafficking. In Finland, the experience shows that the work carried out by

NGOs, particularly in reaching victims and advising them at the early stages, is of special importance when identifying victims.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I would also like to address the situation of Roma children. They are particularly vulnerable to trafficking. This is an issue we need to recognize actively and tackle energetically with emphasis on the root causes in order to ensure the most effective prevention measures. We should build on an OSCE roundtable organized in Albania in 2006 with the title "Building the Capacity of Roma Communities to Prevent Trafficking" and on projects facilitated by ODIHR's Contact Point on Roma and Sinti Issues.
- Finally, one issue in the OSCE Action Plan against trafficking which I consider crucial is the role of research, including that on trafficking in children. Sufficient and well-coordinated research may have a considerable impact, if properly managed and utilized. What counts is to combine the knowledge from different disciplines and sectors of society. In this work, the National Rapporteurs may have a strong role in. While results are not immediately visible, well-coordinated research is essential for informed policy making and action in the longer run.

I wish the conference every success in its work.

Thank you.