

**Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons - Preventing Trafficking in Human beings for  
Labour Exploitation: Decent Work and Social Justice**

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EXPLOITATION**

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It is a great pleasure for me to open and address this OSCE conference on identifying ways to prevent trafficking for labour exploitation.

The OSCE is at the forefront of combating trafficking in human beings and I would like to thank the organisers for bringing us together to provide the powerful international focus that is needed to combat this terrible crime.

Indeed, it is fitting that we meet today in Vienna: the seat of international co-operative activity. It was here in 1993 that the second world conference on Human Rights was held, out of which came the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action: a commitment to our fundamental responsibility to protect and promote the rights of all human beings.

Trafficking for labour exploitation is a violation of human rights that cuts across international boundaries. It is only by nations coming together, as we are today and tomorrow, to share expertise, intelligence and good practice that we can effectively tackle this destructive crime.

This Conference provides a timely opportunity to discuss the challenges that law enforcement officials, prosecutors, judges and other relevant actors face in their everyday efforts to combat trafficking. It is critical that we work together to ensure that traffickers can no more operate with impunity.

The nature of the problem

There can be no doubt that human trafficking in all its forms is an appalling crime in which people are treated as commodities and exploited for profit.

Whilst there is greater awareness of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, there is less understanding and awareness of trafficking for forced labour. But there is increasing realisation that trafficking is occurring in significant numbers in other forms as well. Trafficking for labour exploitation can be found in multiple economic sectors, including agriculture, the fishing industry hospitality and manufacturing and in criminal markets such as drugs cultivation, pickpocketing, begging and benefit fraud.

In terms of defining this crime, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) have given us an excellent starting point by defining trafficking for forced labour as "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the person has not offered himself voluntarily."

As the ILO note, forced labour does not equate simply with low wages or poor working conditions, or cover situations of pure economic necessity, as when a worker feels unable to leave a job because of the real or perceived absence of employment alternatives. Forced labour is about the violation of human rights and is a restriction of human freedom.

A recent scoping study of trafficking for labour exploitation in the UK found that financial control in the form of debt bondage is the most prevalent form of control employed by organised crime groups. Other methods include physical restrictions, and threats of physical violence.

It is hard to believe that such things are happening on our own doorsteps, but only recently 19 Romanian victims of human trafficking were recovered from a situation of labour exploitation on the Isle of Skye in Scotland. They had been recruited in Romania and were promised both good wages and good accommodation in the UK.

Once in Skye they were all required to live in the same house with just one bathroom, one kitchen, no central heating and multi-occupancy bedrooms. They were rarely paid and when they were it was far less than they were due. They were told the cost of the journey to the UK and the fee for arranging work were being recouped from their wages. They often did not have enough money for food. Their work involved picking whelks without any health and safety provision or protective clothing, for long hours and in cold and wet conditions. If they complained the traffickers were verbally abusive.

#### Awareness raising

This case sadly brings to mind the tragedy that exposed the horrors of labour exploitation so brutally in 2004 with the death of 23 Chinese cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay. This event led to the introduction of regulation to protect such vulnerable, temporary workers and to the formation of the Gangmasters' Licensing Authority. In working to ensure labour providers operate within the law, the Gangmasters' Licensing Authority not only safeguards the welfare and interests of workers, but also increases our ability to gather intelligence on labour exploitation.

But sadly, cases of exploitation continue to be uncovered and we are all too aware that there are many that remain undetected.

This is why raising awareness is essential: raising the awareness of potential victims, of employers, of enforcement agencies and of prosecutors.

In the UK progress has been made in raising awareness of trafficking and capability to combat it amongst police forces – through enforcement operations and mandatory training on trafficking for all new police officers. The UK Human Trafficking Centre is an important resource in helping police forces by offering tactical advice, co-ordination and intelligence.

We must also tackle demand. The demand for inexpensive, unprotected and often illegal labour is at the heart of this problem and it is vital that we work to build the environment where this kind of labour is neither desired nor readily available.

There is growing awareness among consumers of the harm caused by unethical business practices. But more needs to be done to increase understanding and encourage greater corporate moral and social responsibility within the private sector.

It is appalling that, over two hundred years since the abolition of slavery, this practice is still in existence in today's society.

### The challenge

But we face a significant challenge. Trafficking for labour exploitation tends to be under-reported and under-investigated. It is hidden, highly complex and resource-intensive to tackle.

Firstly, identifying victims of this crime is no easy task. Few victims of labour exploitation are willing to come forward and speak to the police. Exploited migrant workers do not always consider themselves to be 'victims' of a crime or often fear the consequences of speaking out about their situation. It is critical that victims know that the aim of the State is to prosecute those who have committed these criminal offences against them. Part of that process must include raising awareness of victims' rights and how they may have been deceived.

Achieving prosecutions for this crime continues to be a challenge. In the UK last year there were only 20 successful prosecutions for trafficking for forced labour. Whilst this is an increase on previous years, there is still more to be done and we need a concerted international effort to track down traffickers and bring them to justice.

### What is being done

The valuable work of the OSCE and the commitment of Participating States are critical to tackling trafficking for forced labour. International efforts have brought about significant improvements in recent years in our understanding of the problem and in formulating the necessary laws and enforcement mechanisms to enable trafficking to be tackled more effectively. I am sure that many examples of types of action and good practice will be discussed at this conference and I look forward to hearing about the recommendations that will come out of these discussions.

A good example of international co-operation is the EU Directive on Human Trafficking, which, I am pleased to confirm, the UK will shortly be applying to opt in to.

This Directive seeks to raise the standard of anti-trafficking work across the EU, harmonise victim support approaches and set out a common statement of intent. And, most importantly, it sends out the powerful message that Europe is not a soft touch on trafficking. I will give some examples of what is being done in the UK. We are working hard to improve the recording and monitoring of trafficking for labour.

In the UK we have established a victim identification and support process called the National Referral Mechanism and in its first 21 months of operation it granted a period of recovery and reflection to nearly 250 potential victims of labour exploitation.

We are also seeing clear evidence of improvement in victim identification: NRM figures for this year show that referrals for labour exploitation have increased by 44% in comparison to the previous year.

Through the NRM, these victims can access the specialist support and accommodation that meets their specific needs.

We have now developed this system further by introducing a new model for funding specialist support for adult victims of trafficking in England and Wales, which will enable a wider range of providers to support victims and will deliver support tailored to the individual needs of the victim.

In terms of legislation, the introduction of a new offence last year, of holding someone in slavery or servitude, or requiring a person to perform forced or compulsory labour, has widened our existing legislation to strengthen the options for investigating and prosecuting cases and provide additional protection for such vulnerable workers. This stand alone offence is a good example of human rights legislation which reflects the full extent of criminality involved in forced labour and extends protection to all workers vulnerable to exploitation.

On enforcement, our Crown Prosecution Service is working closely with our Gangmasters' Licensing Authority and our Association of Chief Police Officers to improve investigation and prosecution for trafficking for forced labour and the new stand alone offence of forced and compulsory labour.

The importance of multi-agency working in tackling this crime cannot be overstated. Since the introduction of the NRM - involving police, the UK Borders Agency, social services and NGOs - the UK has seen a great improvement in how we identify and care for victims of trafficking.

The UK Human Trafficking Centre is another example of effective multi-agency working. By working closely with agencies including NGOs, law enforcement agencies, trade unions and the Gangmasters' Licensing Authority, the UKHTC co-ordinates and develops expertise to combat and prevent the trafficking of human beings.

As we are all aware, human trafficking is often a cross border crime. For individual countries, interventions abroad can appear far removed from a factory on an industrial estate or a farm in the countryside where victims can be exploited for labour services. But we know it produces results.

For example, recent co-operation between the UK's Serious Organised Crime Agency and a Hungarian-led investigation into the trafficking of illegal immigrants into the UK for exploitation on cannabis farms led to the successful conviction of the gang behind the exploitation. The victims were Vietnamese nationals trafficked via Moscow and Hungary who were forced to pay their debt by working in UK premises used for the commercial-scale cultivation of cannabis. 17 members of the crime group were found guilty in a Budapest Court in November 2009.

The UK is already working to influence and educate potential victims in source countries about the dangers of trafficking, for example in China and Thailand we have undertaken significant work with the International Organisation for Migration, UNODC and other organisations on trafficking awareness and prevention.

We work closely with airlines and border control authorities in over 50 locations worldwide. Through our Risk and Liaison Overseas Network we work to ensure passengers hold the right travel documents before they travel to the UK and in 2010 we succeeded in preventing over 67,000 people with incorrect, counterfeit or fraudulent documents from travelling to the UK.

Political and diplomatic activities must work in alignment with enforcement efforts. They need to share common objectives, focused on places where criminal operations are based. This work relies on international partnership. I look forward to greater co-operation, to further intelligence-sharing and to more joint operational action.

In the UK we are creating a powerful new multi-agency body for fighting serious and organised crime. From 2013, the new National Crime Agency will spearhead our response to organised crime. It will harness and exploit our existing intelligence, analytical and enforcement capabilities and will work closely with international partners. It will build and maintain a comprehensive picture of the threats, harms and risks from organised criminals, connecting activity from the local to the international – in country, at the border and overseas.

We have recently published details of our plans for the National Crime Agency, and, in the next few weeks, will be publishing our strategies for tackling organised crime, including a new strategy on human trafficking. This strategy will reiterate the UK's intention to take a comprehensive approach to combating trafficking – both by focusing on tackling traffickers and maintaining effective care for victims. But it will mark a greater focus on combating the organised crime groups behind this trade.

Our approach will be based on four key principles:

- enhancing our ability to act early, before the harm has reached the UK;
- smarter, multi-agency action at the border;
- a more co-ordinated policing effort at home; and
- improved victim care arrangements.

Specifically in relation to labour trafficking, our aim is for the UK to work closely with labour inspectorates across European Member States to achieve a commonality of standards to identify and sanction labour exploitation. We also have to ensure that victims of this crime are not unduly criminalised and safeguarded where identified.

I look forward to working more closely with you to achieve this.

#### What needs to be done

I have spoken about the importance of co-operation between States, but this problem also requires the involvement of a range of stakeholders in the design and implementation of responses to trafficking for labour exploitation. Co-operation between governments, international organisations, the private sector and NGOs is essential.

But more can be done. We need to increase our understanding of trafficking for labour exploitation. Further research and analysis is needed if we are to get under the skin of this complex and hidden crime.

We need to continue to work with voluntary sector organisations. NGOs are at the front line in tackling trafficking. Their role in looking after victims, and working with law enforcement to help victims by gaining the trust of highly vulnerable persons who have been subject to abuse, is critical and continued cooperation is essential.

#### Conclusion

Through work across Governments, with law enforcement agencies, and in conjunction with the voluntary sector which plays an important role in the care of victims, I believe we can and will make further strides towards tackling this menace.

The tasks ahead are certainly difficult. The very nature of this covert crime means that no-one can be entirely satisfied that it is totally under control.

It is for this reason that we need to keep under review all aspects of our work to combat this crime.

I would like to thank the OSCE once again for organising this important conference.

In both national and international contexts, it is vital that there is long term, multi-agency commitment to combat trafficking for labour exploitation. I am sure I speak for everyone here in praising the tireless efforts by the OSCE to combat trafficking.

I look forward to the presentations by our distinguished speakers and panellists and the discussions that will follow, which I trust will contribute further to preventing trafficking for labour exploitation.

Thank you.