



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

**High-level Conference on
Combating Trafficking in Human Beings,
Especially Women and Children:
Prevention - Protection - Prosecution**

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Statement by the
International Organization for Migration (IOM)

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Usually I speak of the positive effects of migration and how this global and historic human phenomenon benefits both migrants and society. Today, however, we are discussing the darkest side of migration – the exploitation and abuse of the most vulnerable of all migrants: children, both boys and girls.

There are no concrete statistics on the scale of child trafficking, with estimates varying widely. The recently released Second Annual Report on Victims of Trafficking produced by IOM and the Stability Pact Task Force/IOM-sponsored Regional Clearing Point in Belgrade concludes that victims, including children, are increasingly being trafficked for forced labour, begging and delinquency, as well as sexual exploitation or a combination of both. Statistics remain elusive due to the clandestine nature of trafficking in human beings and the lack of comparable data.

There are a variety of reasons for the lack of comparable statistics. Notable with data relating to children is that age is difficult to determine, and data is recorded based on the age of the victim upon identification rather than recruitment. Of victims identified and assisted in South Eastern Europe in 2003, 35% were under 18 years old on identification, however 59% were under 18 years old when recruited. Thus the actual number of trafficked children is likely to be higher than statistics reveal.

Child victims of trafficking – boys and girls -- are often subject to a variety of forms of exploitation including sexual exploitation, forced labour, begging and delinquency. There is emerging evidence to suggest that the exploitation of trafficked children is often progressive - once they are caught up in the situation, they are vulnerable to repeated and various exploitations.

Allow me to quickly go through what I consider to be some of the most worrisome aspects of child trafficking today.

There are huge gaps in the identification of child victims, and while there is no evidence to suggest a change in the overall number of children trafficked, NGOs say that the majority of victims are children when they are recruited. For example, there remains a focus on trafficking for sexual exploitation, but more attention and recognition needs to be given to other forms of child trafficking in which they are compelled into begging, forced labour and criminal activities. Under-reporting is still evident as in many cases children are not identified as trafficked or exploited but seen as delinquents, and the distinction between adult and child victims still remains too rare.

In some countries, trafficking legislation and practice continue to focus on foreign victims, whereas there are indications of a significant growth in internal trafficking in children. More attention should be paid to child victims of internal trafficking.

Here in Europe, IOM and other agencies have noted a new trend of children trafficked with their parents or mothers, often for exploitation in street begging. This may be a strategy to foil authorities or simply a method of exerting greater control by the trafficker.

There is also the increasing phenomenon of unaccompanied minors intercepted upon arrival in EU States and who subsequently disappear from reception centres. Are they victims of traffickers? We do not know if they are or not, but this phenomenon is a reflection of the complexities of global migration today, and the particularly vulnerable position of children. It should lead us to the conclusion that when there is doubt as to a migrant child's status, the State should provide at least the same level of protection as it would for one of its nationals. In short, child protection systems should be better applied at the national level in order to protect children more effectively from becoming vulnerable to trafficking and unsafe migration.

Let us also not forget the children left at home by trafficked women: they too are victims of traffickers. In some countries, over one third of trafficked women are single mothers whose desperation to provide for their child has led them into the clutches of traffickers.

Whether we are speaking of a child trafficked for begging on the streets of Europe, a young girl in Asia coerced into prostitution, or a boy in Africa abducted and forced to take up

arms, the extreme forms of trauma experienced by these children are the same: separation from loved ones and support systems; psychological humiliation; witnessing and suffering physical violence and sexual abuse. The list goes on. And all of us here today have a responsibility to spare no effort to try to put and end to this suffering and prevent it from happening.

In this regard I applaud the participants from the law enforcement field who took part in the Austrian Federal Ministry of Interior and IOM's training in combating child trafficking here in Vienna this week. It is my sincere hope that they will apply the skills they have acquired in making inroads against this most serious of crimes that attacks the most vulnerable members of our society. I urge all practitioners to make use of the Resource Book that has been developed through this AGIS project.

From the side of IOM I can assure all of you here today that we shall continue, with our partners, to contribute to the fight against human trafficking that we have now been involved in for ten years. Over the coming months, as part of our contribution to the High Level Dialogue on Migration, we shall be emphasising the need to consider human trafficking as a core migration issue. Later this year, at the request of the Government of Belarus, we expect to work with them in organising a major conference in Minsk that will address, among other issues, that of the demand that leads to trafficking and exploitation. While IOM is committed to addressing human trafficking through global policy fora, IOM Missions in more than 70 countries are working with governments, law enforcement bodies and NGOs at the operational level.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the European Commission and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Interior who provided the funding for this important project that I have no doubt will significantly contribute to the protection of our children. And here I would like to acknowledge the Austrian EU Presidency's particular focus on child trafficking. I am also most grateful to the other project partners including the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Belgian Federal Police, Europol and OSCE. And of course I thank our colleagues from IOM's Mission in Austria who contributed so much to the project's success.

In order to make real progress in the fight against human trafficking, Governments, International Organisations and NGOs need to work closely together to address this

phenomenon of exploitation and violation of rights that encompasses such a vast array of issues as organised crime, migration, health and development. Where there is true cooperation between partners, positive results ensue. The AGIS Programme on Law Enforcement Training on Child Trafficking is one such example.

Let us all continue to combine our efforts to more effectively prosecute and convict child traffickers, and provide better protection to children from all nations.

Thank you.