

**Talking Points of Ms. Eva Biaudet, the OSCE Special Representative and  
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**SEMINAR ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN EUROPE  
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Dear Mr(s) Chairman,  
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Former Colleagues and Friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here in Helsinki today, representing the OSCE and participating in this important seminar on trafficking in human beings in Europe. I would like to start by thanking the Finnish Committee for European Security for arranging this event, which I hope will shed further light on the complexity and magnitude of the problem of THB in Europe and beyond. In particular, I hope that the seminar will further increase the awareness among policy makers on this issue.

When reading through international political commitments and legal instruments on THB, we easily can be lead into the false belief that we already have achieved quite a lot in trying to eradicate human trafficking from our societies. Until we take a closer look into the reality in most parts of the world, including Europe and the Nordic countries.

In my opinion it is inconceivable that today, the very same year that we celebrate that two centuries have passed since the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, we haven't been able to stop or even decrease the inhuman exploitation of millions of human beings, mainly women and children but also men. Each year, hundreds of thousands persons become trapped into lives of violence and humiliation, in debt bondage, servitude and forced labour, deprived of fundamental rights and reduced into slave-like conditions in countries around the world, including the European countries. Alone in Europe the ILO estimates that there are 400-500 hundred thousand trafficking victims. These individuals are kept isolated and many times confined. They are physically and sexually abused; their identities – and their identity documents – are taken away from them. They are charged heavily for every basic need and kept in a

merciless state of debt bondage, exploited for prostitution and other sexual activities, begging and forced labour, in agriculture, construction, domestic and restaurant work, and other forms of labour and services.

This ruthless crime and serious human rights violation is hidden, well organized, and growing. According to Kevin Bales, one of the leading researchers on THB today, there are in fact more men, women and children held in slave-like conditions in our time than during the height of the transatlantic slave trade.

Dear ladies and gentlemen, this is not acceptable!

What is the reason why human trafficking is still flourishing despite all the rhetoric and efforts taken by governments, international organisations and NGOs in recent years? What can we do to stop the inhuman exploitation of our brothers, our sisters and our children?

First of all we have to accept that combating THB, be it an intolerable breach of a person's human rights and freedom, as so many other contemporary issues of concern, is a question about political priorities. On the political level and based on the international political and legal commitments taken by states, the UN Palermo Protocol, the Council of Europe Convention and the OSCE Action Plan, there is indeed a consensus that fighting THB has to be a priority, and also that the problem foremost should be tackled from a Human Rights perspective. Unfortunately we however know that this does not correspond with reality.

One of the fundamental problems is that many destination countries of trafficking, including European countries, which proudly claim to be the homelands of Human Rights, have standard practices whereby protecting the fundamental rights of victims of THB is subordinated to other priorities of the state. Governments claim they are combating THB, while they in fact consider tackling illegal immigration their top priority.

Not only at the national level and within the EU, but also other international co-operation in past years has seen significant action aimed at strengthening border security and preventing irregular migration.

However understandable it is that strong migration pressures have to be addressed, the actions, from a HR-perspective, have to be balanced and respecting people's basic rights. How hazardous this migration endeavour is for the migrants themselves is easily understood when we know that during the last twenty years 7180 migrants have died at the borders of Europe. 2141 of them were lost at sea. The strong focus on stopping migrants also makes it very difficult to identify even clear trafficking victims within the migrants in detention.

Unfortunately, the downside of this failure in differentiating between human trafficking and smuggling of migrants leads to the neglecting and mistreatment of trafficking victims and contributes to the impunity of traffickers. Furthermore, when victims are identified and perhaps granted a temporary right to stay, in most countries the right to remain depends on whether they are needed to testify in criminal prosecutions and brave/naïve enough to co-operate with law enforcement agencies.

The lack of adequate protection schemes for victims and the lack of funding for such non-governmental service-providers is worrying, and in fact contributes significantly to the difficulty of obtaining victim's testimony, which remains a key challenge in prosecuting trafficking cases. In many cases victims come from countries with widespread corruption within law enforcement and do not feel they can trust the police or any authorities.

Victims are not without reason fearful of retaliation from their traffickers in the absence of adequate security and witness protection. Sufficient evidence exists to indicate that there is a strong correlation between the nature of protection and assistance provided to victims and the rates of prosecution. Because of this I recommend those states that do not yet have comprehensive witness protection programmes and possibilities to anonymous testifying to consider establishing such procedures.

Another important issue when combating THB is the need for systematic assessment of the situation and indications of shortcomings in existing strategies. Reliable up-to-date data that is well compiled and analysed is helpful for having sound and sustainable anti-trafficking policies. A National Rapporteur function could serve as monitoring mechanism at

the national level; The OSCE Action Plan from 2003 does in fact recommend states to establish such mechanisms, and I personally believe that having such at the national level is of key importance for addressing resources adequately and for building comprehensive policies that create a hostile environment for all kinds of trafficking in persons and exploitation.

Most important if we want to brake the chains of trafficking and turn this fight into a success story is, however, that we - and by we I mean both decision-makers and ordinary people living in the industrialised world - all of us who live in the destination-countries of trafficking take a deep look in the mirror and accept our responsibility. Trafficking more than anything else is a problem of supply and demand. Exploitation of people, selling and buying girls and boys as goods with no human value would not exist without our passivity and silent approval. It is equally a choice to turn a blind eye to the problem as it is to start addressing the socio-economic root-causes contributing to trafficking, such as social exclusion, poverty, discrimination, intolerance, insufficient migration policies, inadequacy of social protection systems in transition countries, corruption among officials, xenophobia, gender discrimination and last but not least indifference to respect human dignity and human rights.

Changing human behaviour is difficult but when it comes to fighting THB it is the only solution to the problem. It is all about our common humanity! We need to stop the demand for commercial sexual services because we know that victims of trafficking, vulnerable women and innocent children end up being exploited in the sex industry, regardless of whether prostitution or the purchase of sexual services has been criminalized or not. Where there is a prospering sex industry there seems to be trafficking and exploitation. Where there is a big market for sex there is also a market for children. The question of how to address prostitution and the criminalisation of purchase of sex, we all know is a hot topic and opinions are divided both within countries and between governments. What we do know, from experiences in countries where prostitution is legalized, is that THB has not decreased in these countries. Therefore we should take a closer look at Sweden, where purchase of sexual services has been criminalised since 1999. We might not yet have a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of the Swedish legislation, but the

assessments made so far clearly indicate that prostitution has decreased and organised criminal groups involved in prostitution have diminished. The other immediate consequence is that the Swedish norm for what is acceptable and what is not has changed and been clarified. The Swedish people have decided that a society that builds on equality and non-discrimination cannot accept that women or men are sold in prostitution. On the contrary, the responsibility of society and of government is to protect vulnerable men, women and children from all kinds of exploitation.

Much of the discussion on THB, especially in the Nordic countries, has centred on sexual exploitation. However, as a result of globalisation THB is also increasingly taking the form of labour exploitation or trafficking in children for begging and petty crimes. Children are sold for begging, kept with little food and locked in cellars. A child beggar in Vienna, for instance, can collect as much as 100 euros a day for his trafficker. The profit is amazing. And as we speak, several investigations of labour exploitation in fact are being conducted also in Finland, where especially the restaurant sector is in the focus.

Many Europeans at first did not believe their ears when heard last summer that the Italian police had liberated over 100 Polish farm workers, many of whom had been working for months under slave-like conditions picking tomatoes in southern Italy. This was the first time a broader European public heard of forced labour camps. In Italy it was at that point by no means any secret that casual workers from Eastern Europe were working in agriculture in southern Italy, but no one imagined they had been subject to outright slavery. For years the local authorities did not want to hear about the problem, although they had been contacted on numerous occasions. Nevertheless, as a result of this investigation, prosecutors also decided to reopen cases of 14 Poles who had died under suspicious circumstances in the same region in recent years. The ruthless methods used by the traffickers became clear to everybody from phone recordings. The police overheard a trafficking gang master, angry about the escape of two workers, saying "I will not allow them to behave like that. Today I'll go along to the fields and kill a couple, just to set an example".

Violence is a feature of all forms of trafficking – it leaves lifelong marks on a victim both physically and mentally.

Dear friends, exactly the same kind of scenario is perhaps not likely to be revealed in Finland or in the other Nordic countries, but the lesson to be learnt is that large scale and organized trafficking also for labour exploitation can take place almost anywhere and for years without being detected. And again we, the “customers” in the most prosperous parts of the world, have to ask ourselves where our responsibilities lie. Our constant craving for less expensive products and services has, to be morally acceptable, to be combined with sincere efforts of becoming more enlightened and responsible in our behaviour and choices. Increasingly we need to start verifying that manufacturers of goods and service providers can provide us with proof that their products and services are ethically produced, including having of course, not been produced by victims of trafficking.

On the issue of trafficking for labour exploitation, let me finish by pointing to the worrying fact that today global unemployment is higher than ever before and currently the world’s population is growing at a faster rate than jobs are created. These circumstances, if not dealt with, will surely further increase irregular migration and the number of victims of trafficking.

Lastly, I want to point to the alarming fact that in many countries children are the most vulnerable of all groups who stand risk at falling victims of trafficking. According to a recent article in the Herald Tribune, there are as much as 10 million children in prostitution around the world. This we simply cannot accept! Some of the most urgent actions that have to be taken are that budgets for child protection systems have to be increased significantly both in countries of origin and destination, so that there is accessibility and inclusion of all children, without distinction to nationality or ethnic background.

Governments are responsible for providing all their children and their families possibilities to education and livelihood. We have to start to

require this also from the “frail states”, the countries of origin, where poverty is as much result of corruption, bad governance, no democratic structures and no interest for human security. Furthermore, European governments should realize that human rights are universal also in practice. There are 5-8 million undocumented people living in Western Europe - a substantial number of them being children whose vulnerability of becoming victim of any kind of abuse or of trafficking is obvious. Protecting these children and giving them a right to school and healthcare has to become a priority. Governments also have to support child protection agencies because they have a crucial role to play to prevent child trafficking, recognizing and addressing the vulnerability of children to exploitation and timely intervening.

Dear ladies and gentlemen! Trafficking can flourish only in environments where States and people fail to guarantee the human rights of all persons living within their jurisdiction. Victims, who many times belong to national, ethnic or religious minorities, are identified and their rights are respected only in societies where tolerance, mutual respect and equal opportunities prevail and where people are not left alone because of “otherness”. Let us together do everything we can to provide human rights for all people and make Europe a hostile environment for traffickers!

Thank you for your attendance!