



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
20th Alliance Conference against Trafficking in Persons
Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings
Closing Remarks

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has taken a great effort to put this conference back on track under current new circumstances. However, it's been a fascinating three-day discussion and indeed, this has been the most global Alliance conference yet, with over 800 participants and viewers from 70 countries, and over 300 international and civil society organizations. I would like to wholeheartedly thank the ICT team, the interpreters and the whole Conference Services team, our friends in COMMS, as well as my team for their hard work and dedication without which this conference would not have taken place.

As a former prosecutor, I have listened to victims describe the harm they had experienced, heard their feelings of helplessness, and their pleas for justice. Impunity directly feeds into the worst fears of victims.

Sean Wheeler, who you heard yesterday, told us that through this conference he feels truly encouraged seeing how many people are engaged in this fight. I am equally encouraged that we are listening to those who have been harmed. And we will close this conference feeling inspired and with a strong will to do better and give an extra push in the fight against trafficking. We owe a great debt to those victims and survivors who have lent their voices to this effort and to the others who have spoken up.

I believe the widespread impunity for traffickers in human beings is a grave concern for the rule of law in our region, the security of our societies, and the safety of all our citizens. As a regional security organization we have the utmost responsibility to support participating States in tackling this scourge. And it is not only security issue but obviously a human rights issue. Exploitation violates the dignity of those who suffer it, creates trauma that can last a lifetime, and frays the fabric of our communities. It is a hidden shame in our society, and it is time to prioritize political and financial resources to seriously address this crime.

I hope, and I believe, that conversations like the ones we've had over the past days can help us move in the right direction. Prosecuting traffickers alone is not the end of human trafficking, but it surely is a step toward ending it. We need to replace the current culture of impunity with a culture of justice.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have heard in detail about the monumental challenge in front of us. However, we have also learnt that we can change that equation. There are plenty of good policies and practices out there, in the OSCE region and beyond. If replicated and implemented to their full potential,

and if backed by significant investment and political will, they can bring about a positive impact and effectively help more victims of exploitation and put an end to human trafficking.

We learnt, for example, that the establishment of **specialized anti-trafficking units** and strengthened **multi-agency cooperation** produce stronger evidence leading to more successful prosecutions. This idea of cooperation also extends to the establishment of **joint investigation teams**, which allow authorities to tackle complex cross-border cases.

In terms of working smarter, we learned that greater cooperation between law enforcement agencies and **financial investigators** and **financial services companies** can lead to strong evidence to identify traffickers and victims, support prosecutions and assist courts in confiscating illicit funds and compensating victims. In addition, investigators need to develop skills to detect suspicious transactions, in particular cryptocurrency movements, as criminals increasingly prefer these methods of hiding and moving their profits. Likewise, we can promote technology tools to conduct market-level investigations—rather than case-based investigations—to dismantle larger chunks of the exploitation infrastructure.

We heard about the need to offer regular, specialized and sustainable **training programmes** for relevant law enforcement units across sectors (including financial, cyber, labour, migration, and border police) as well as the training of judges in order to enable proper identification and support of victims, including protecting their rights, as well as consistent application of law and appropriate sentences based on the seriousness of the crime. And to recall Sister Bottani, where there is vulnerability, there are often grey zones where trafficking can remain hidden in plain sight. At times, victims do not even see themselves as victims, so investigators need to be trained to find and detect situations of exploitation and to properly support victims.

We also learned that there are no shortcuts to the **protection and promotion of the rights of victims**. These should always be the primary consideration. The use of a victim-centred, gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approach by the criminal justice system is not only highly important in ensuring victim's rights throughout the recovery and reintegration process, but also in implementing effective prosecutorial responses. In this regard, the full application of the principle of non-punishment of victims for their involvement in unlawful activities where they have been compelled to do so plays a key role. Also, strong national referral mechanisms for the identification and protection of victims have the potential to lead to better engagement and cooperation, and eventually contribute not only to better outcomes for victims but to better prosecutions and accountability for traffickers. Supported victims lead to stronger cases.

Moreover, when they are supported, listened to and empowered, victims of trafficking can offer unique guidance not only in policy discussions, but in law-enforcement operations on the ground as well. And we heard some great examples of that.

We also need to address the lack of mechanisms to hold **users and facilitators**, as well as legal entities, criminally liable for human trafficking offences by filling loopholes and extending our reach to all participants in the human trafficking enterprise.

Finally, I took note of the broad consensus on how important it is to have the **necessary resources and political will** for law enforcement, prosecution and judiciary bodies, be they financial, human, material or policy resources, in order to carry out their anti-trafficking tasks. This is perhaps the most challenging and yet most important ingredient, Change will not happen by itself, we must *want* it. This is particularly true in these times of crisis, with the COVID-19 pandemic and its heavy impact on the economic system. We need to prioritize resources for

anti-trafficking efforts, whether providing victims with access to safe and immediate accommodation even in time of lockdown, or planning systematic labour inspections of high-risk industries. Without targeted action, this health and economic crisis risks becoming a human trafficking crisis, as vulnerabilities will compound in the months to come.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Most, if not all, of the elements I enumerated earlier already exist on paper in the form of OSCE commitments. Which is indicative of the forward-leaning nature of the OSCE's work. But the implementation is lacking. As a result, too many traffickers are still running their "businesses" and recklessly exploiting human lives, while survivors are wrestling with the consequences of their exploitation. This has to change. Those deprived of their freedom and their future deserve justice. It is therefore urgent that we respond.

Today, I call on us all to start turning the tide on the negative trend that we highlighted at the beginning of this conference. When tackling large challenges, we need to be ambitious in our efforts. With this in mind, I would like to propose a specific target for change: I urge all participating States to set a concrete goal of tripling the number of prosecutions within the next three years.

My Office stands ready to support you and your anti-trafficking authorities in designing and implementing effective strategies to prosecute traffickers and deliver justice to more victims.

I encourage all participating States to step up and invest more in combating this crime, which affects millions of people in our region. Passing a law against human trafficking is not enough; we must build the capacities of law enforcement, prosecutors and judges to be more effective, and we must offer more support and protection to victims who come forward. But none of this will work without political will. We must *want* change. We must *believe* in change. We must carry with us the voices of those who endured human trafficking and honor their courage.

It is an uncomfortable truth that no country has defeated human trafficking. But winning is possible. As a region, we have an opportunity to take the lead, rather than surrender – let's seize this opportunity. We owe it to the millions of victims who deserve justice, and to all our citizens.

One more time before closing this conference, let us find inspiration in the words of our survivors-leaders who are showing us the way forward.

Too often the victims bear the burden caused by those who profited from their victimization and too many cases are left unattended because victims are not seen, heard or believed. This can change if we listen to victims and take action now.

And now, for final remarks, I am delighted to welcome Ambassador Hasani, Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council. Ambassador Hasani, as I said at the beginning of this conference, this effort needs champions and I applaud Albania's leadership on this topic, elevating trafficking to a priority for the Chair in 2020 and backing that with up with new and impactful activities on the ground.