



## Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

### Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

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Parliamentary Forum on the Occasion of the  
Vienna Forum to Fight Human Trafficking  
Vienna, 12 February 2008

Summary of the Proceedings and Recommendations  
by Ms. Eva Biaudet, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator  
for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

Dear Colleagues,

It was with great pleasure that I accepted the invitation to address the Parliamentary Assembly and to share with you some of the highlights and concrete points which resulted from today's work.

Our host, Ms. Prammer, highlighted that today we are setting another milestone in the fight against trafficking; and, indeed, if we as Parliamentarians work together we can contribute to eradicating trafficking in human beings (THB). Parliamentarians have a leading role in our community and, as such, the next meeting in South Africa of the IPU focusing on migration and THB is timely, as we prepare for the next Global Forum on Migration and Development hosted by the Government of the Philippines in which trafficking in human beings will be included in the discussions,

We heard that ...

States need to ratify the pertinent international legal instruments – the Palermo Protocol, Council of Europe Convention, as well as the implementation of international and regional commitments, such as regional plans of action in Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia. However, ratification of legal instruments is not the end process – more important is implementation - if we want to address prevention, ensure adequate protection of victims and prosecute traffickers.

We were called upon by Mr. Costa to overcome apathy and start to act as members of Parliament; but let me add also that we should first and foremost act as citizens - thus, we should not look away when we see a potential victim of trafficking, for instance, a child begging in the streets of our capitals.

We were also reminded not to lose sight of the fact that human trafficking is a persistent, ever present violation of human rights, and a very complex issue. Therefore, short sight and “quick fix” measures, such as draconian restrictions on legal entry of migrants, combined with a lack of understanding and action to address labour market needs in countries of destination, may only fuel irregular migration channels, while fostering exploitative conditions of vulnerable groups.

We must ensure that our response on policy and operative levels reflects the complexity of the crime and does no harm to those we want to see identified and protected. In this regard, our policies and actions should not be instruments with which to punish the victims; they should be instruments which empower trafficked persons to start a new life.

We know that the reality of individual cases is complex, and that there is often a very fine line between labour exploitation and substandard working conditions. For example, THB involves a wide range of situations: it involves multiple coercive, abusive and exploitative elements over a period of time, which may be difficult to detect. Yet, ultimately it is the responsibility of States to address these structural issues and create an environment where exploitation cannot flourish; and this requires concerted efforts.

During the interactive session this morning, we were reminded of some key elements when looking at THB: root-causes, "push-pull" factors, as well as the need to differentiate smuggling from trafficking. This session gave us the opportunity to walk through a number of case scenarios, thus bringing us closer to the experiences of the victims, being able to hear their **voices**. However, it is crucial that we integrate these voices in our everyday work, if we truly want to make a difference in the victims' life. Furthermore, the case scenarios also showed clearly that training, allocation of appropriate resources, well structured services and a multidisciplinary approach, where the victim is at the centre of our intervention, is in fact the main component if we want to prosecute traffickers, instead of simply working towards disrupting criminal networks.

We all recognize the need to strengthen co-operation among stakeholders and organizations in order to reinforce a common message and efforts in this field, and to this end the Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons has been instrumental within the OSCE Region, by bringing together parliamentarians, policy makers, civil society and international organizations, including UNODC, IOM, ILO, and others from the UN family. Partnership between State institutions and civil society is a crucial building block in the fight against trafficking. Furthermore, the media also plays an important role as a vehicle to raise the awareness of the public on this issue. Moreover, tools such as the Handbook for Parliamentarians can play a substantial part in our work as policy makers.

Today, once again, we reiterate that THB is a phenomenon that is hidden, well organized, and tragically it is still growing and adapting despite all measures taken during the past decade to stop it.

Illustrative of our lack of knowledge is that global estimates on a number of trafficking victims made in recent years by various stakeholders, most of them international organizations, have varied so much, and that many international experts' estimations seem just to represent the tip of the iceberg. More alarming is the lack of data and empirical evidence at national level, perhaps because most countries don't have a national reporting mechanism, such as a National Rapporteur or equivalent mechanism which can monitor and report on anti-trafficking policies and activities of State institutions, as well as on the implementation of national legislation.

What happens internationally is much talked about, but let's be honest: it is at the local and national level that we have to act in order to contribute globally!

More than ever, we need information not only on the scope of the problem but, most importantly, on trends of this criminal behavior and its different forms and purpose; new patterns of exploitation have also emerged since we began this work: women, children and men are increasingly being trapped in a life of exploitation and abuse.

I can only say that in the midst of this lack of understanding we are faced with the fact that we only have a perception of the facets of the problem, but we lack an overall full picture of its magnitude.

National policies on human trafficking are still too based on perceptions: for instance, mainly focusing on combating irregular migration or being in the domain of a few ministries and committees, mostly dominated by a framework of order and justice. I believe that by failing to have a holistic and comprehensive approach on this issue which runs through the whole spectrum ...from development and trade policies to the one on prosecution ... we will not reach concrete results. In addition, we must move from perception to evidence-based policy in order to reach sustainability and truly eradicate THB in this century!

I trust that the role of Parliament in the fight against THB is not only to discuss and amend national law; it is rather a vehicle for national reflection on how to CHANGE.... In fact, sound national policy demands first of all a reflection on what we have achieved, what are the new challenges, what should be adapted, continued, etc.?

In order for constructive dialogue involving all interested stakeholders, including civil society, to take place, Parliamentarians should not only rely and wait for governments to enact an National Action Plan, or to receive the latest report from the leading institution in charge of THB, but rather - if trafficking in human beings is a priority at national level - then I believe Parliamentarians should call for a day of national reflection on the issue.

We hear very often from national authorities that THB is a priority in their agenda, but let's ponder for a moment - how many times has this issue been discussed in Parliament? When are the discussions truly comprehensive, thus including the development prospect as part of prevention, and the gender dimension as part of sensitive migration policy, which could promote more safe migration mechanism for women.

In our part of the world, the European Commission has designated 18 October as the THB Day so why not adopt this day, at least in the EU Countries, as a day of national reflection on which Parliamentarians from different segments (development, equality, finance, interior, health, etc.) come together to discuss and contribute towards concrete policies and results in order to curb this crime?

And perhaps we should be even more ambitious and mark this date, 12 February, to come together in the near future as a true Global Forum, bringing our contributions,

challenges and achievements ... fruit of our reflections and work at local, national and regional level ... to the world at large in order to see this crime eradicated once and for all!

Thank you.