



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Special Representative and Coordinator on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings, Val Richey

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 25, 2021

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.

The United States welcomes OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Val Richey back to the Permanent Council. We strongly support OSCE efforts to combat human trafficking and we thank you and your office for the critically important work that you do. I also want to thank you and your team for all the support and assistance that you have provided in ensuring that the draft ministerial decision, that several of my colleagues have recently referred to, is as strong as possible and adds to the organization's acquis. I also want to thank all of the delegations for negotiating in good faith on that. We are really very hopeful that maybe this year we will be able to add to the acquis. I also want to thank you for your report, because clearly it has been a very busy year.

The United States welcomes the practical assistance your office has provided to participating States this year. We have long supported the live simulation training exercises that have been held regularly in Vicenza, Italy, that bring together law enforcement authorities, judicial officials, service providers, and civil society to strengthen expertise and cooperation in investigating trafficking situations and identifying and assisting victims. We applaud that this year live training exercises have also been held in Ukraine, Albania, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan. This is the epitome of hands-on training.

We also appreciate your focus on prosecution and the roundtables your office has held to strengthen government efforts in this regard, particularly at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has made holding judicial proceedings a challenge.

This year’s Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons Conference focused on addressing demand, which is also a priority area for the United States in combating human trafficking. We greatly appreciated the inclusion of survivors’ voices throughout the conference. The United States believes it is crucial that survivors help guide and inform our policy discussions and program implementation on the ground in support of a victim-centered and trauma-informed approach.

We welcome that your office followed up on the theme of the Alliance Conference with a publication focused on addressing the demand that fosters sexual exploitation that leads to human trafficking, as well as with your continued activities to prevent human trafficking in public and institutional supply chains. We recognize the leadership role that the OSCE has taken internationally in promoting measures to prevent trafficking in persons in the OSCE’s supply chains, and we welcome that the OSCE is now sharing its experience and assisting other multi-lateral organizations, including the UN, to prevent human trafficking in their procurement supply chains.

Your office has also shown leadership through publications to assist participating States in applying a gender-sensitive approach in policies and programs and in undertaking more effective financial investigations. The increased misuse by traffickers of online platforms and of cryptocurrencies makes it all the more important that our governments have the tools to keep up with the changing dynamics of human trafficking in an increasingly digital world. I would be interested to hear where you think the OSCE could play a role in addressing these new challenges?

We continue to appreciate your collaboration with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, with other parts of the Secretariat, and with field missions. Our ability to combat trafficking in human beings is multiplied when we coordinate and collaborate effectively as an organization, as participating States, and among the international community.

Finally, I would like to welcome your office's focus on racial and ethnic discrimination in the context of human trafficking. While U.S. efforts to combat human trafficking have grown over the years, the United States still struggles with how to address the disparate effects of human trafficking on racial and other underserved or minority communities. Systemic discrimination creates inequities between communities, whether the discrimination targets perceptions of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, or any other social identities. These inequities undercut our goal of combating human trafficking and embolden human traffickers. On his first day in office, President Biden signed an Executive Order on advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities, which established that affirmatively advancing equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunity is the responsibility of the whole of our government. We are committed to engage with government experts, civil society, private sector, and survivor leader partners – and with the OSCE - to better understand the systemic effects of racism on human trafficking and to integrate racial equity more intentionally into the U.S. anti-trafficking response.

In closing Val, I would like to wish you happy thanksgiving and I would also like to say that I, at least, am thankful everyday for the work of you and your team.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.

###