



## **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

### **Secretary General's opening remarks at the ICAT High-Level event on "trafficking in persons and sustainable procurement"**

Thank you very much, dear Ghada!

And thank you for your leadership in convening this event and timely discussion. As the Secretary General of the largest regional security Organization, effective prevention of human rights abuses is one of my top priorities, and I am delighted to see momentum in the growing recognition of public procurement as an essential part of this discussion.

We need decision-makers to engage in these conversations, so I am delighted to see this level of attention today.

I know we have a busy agenda, so let me jump right into it.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Trafficking in persons continues to flourish as a highly lucrative crime. The use of forced labour is increasingly prevalent in the production of goods and services that we all, governments, international organizations and private companies regularly procure, which inadvertently fuels human trafficking and forced labour. In other words, we are fuelling trafficking with our own purchases.

The problem is steadily growing and action is urgently needed - only in the last 15 years profits from human trafficking increased fivefold.

A recent case became worldwide news and shed a light on these issues – Top Glove. Massive purchases of gloves to respond to a public health crisis turned into a forced labour crisis, when it became clear those millions of gloves we were all buying were produced by forced labour.

Strengthening good governance practices helps limit the purchase of these goods, and enables States to protect human rights and promote fairer economic systems. One of the most effective

ways to disrupt and prevent human trafficking for forced labour is to eliminate the market for goods or services produced by trafficked people through informed and ethical purchasing.

The concept is simple: we all must stop paying for trafficking.

Governments and International organizations can play a fundamental role in this process by adopting and implementing laws and policies that protect supply chains and strengthen the due diligence performed by public sector entities. These protections undermine the financial profits of exploitation by eliminating the purchase of goods and services extracted from trafficking victims. At the same time, such measures promote fair competition, sustainable economies and human rights.

In this sense, public procurement can be (and indeed must be) a powerful tool for change. Public entities can lead by example, and enact measures that ensure their purchases are not fuelling those heinous human rights violations they are set to prevent.

The tools are there, but must be used. We are going to hear more about them later.

International Organizations can show the way and support States. The OSCE is a proud co-chair of the Task Force [for the Development of a Joint Approach in Combating Human Trafficking and Forced Labour in Supply Chains] within the United Nations [High-Level Committee on Management]. But our work does not stop there. Internally, we updated and strengthened our procurement policies and included explicit prohibitions on doing business with suppliers who contribute, directly or indirectly, to forced and child labour or any form of trafficking. All companies doing business with us must adhere to these conditions. But effectively preventing forced labour requires more than a well-written piece of paper, of course. This is why we are training our procurement personnel and managers in Vienna and in the field to ensure that these policies are effectively implemented.

The policy paper we launch today is a testament of the common vision of all ICAT entities on this issue. It represents an important step forward in the direction of stronger and more coherent public action on this front.

Thank you for your interest in this topic and your engagement today. You can count on our support as you develop you own strategies to prevent trafficking in human beings in your own supply chains.