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"Winning our common fight against trafficking"

OSCE Economic Forum

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(Introduction)

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. I intend to be brief today. For one simple reason: there has been enough talk already when it comes to the issues on our agenda for the coming three days. We have passed the stage of mere rhetoric. We must now focus on concrete measures that can deliver the results we seek. It is my hope that when it comes to the issues at hand – trafficking in human beings, in small arms and light weapons and in drugs – here in Prague you will debate not the urgency of the problem, but rather how we can best address it.

For the urgency of the problem is surely beyond debate. Since becoming CiO, the Netherlands has maintained that we must place the issue of trafficking at the top of this organisation's agenda. It has done so, because unlike many other security and human rights-related issues human trafficking concerns us every bit as much as it concerns our neighbours to the east, north, south or west. Victims of the modern-day slave trade can be found behind windows in red-light districts in Amsterdam just as easily as they can be found in other parts of Europe. Weapons traded illegally are marketed in the Netherlands just as they are marketed elsewhere. And drugs, too, are a problem all across the OSCE region, including the Netherlands.

(Realism)

We cannot afford to underestimate a trade that involves so much money, that is so disruptive to so many people's lives and that undermines stability and security in so many countries. When there is so much at stake we should look at matters realistically. That means seeing things as they are: tackling the problem of trafficking is not simply a challenge or an ambition. No, it is a necessity and it will be a fight. And a real fight, too.

The question is: how to win?

(Winning the fight)

First of all, we should base our strategy on the knowledge that the three dimensions of trafficking (of human beings, of arms and of drugs) share many characteristics:

- the forces involved are of a global nature;
- as such, they defy traditional notions of sovereignty;
- they are motivated by large profits sustained by a strong, even if illegal, market;
- and they use networks that are flexible, invisible and extremely hard to target.

Second, we should recognise that the three dimensions of trafficking not only share many characteristics, they are also linked. During the preparatory seminars for this Forum several speakers highlighted the economic link between organised

crime, trafficking and economic development. It is these economic aspects that have so far remained underexposed. It is my hope that this Forum will focus precisely on them. We should look at financial flows linked to trafficking; at involving the private sector in the struggle against trafficking, for example in partnership with governments; we should look at the economic push and pull factors influencing trafficking; and we should focus on the root economic causes of trafficking.

By the end of the day on Friday we should have identified a number of measures that we can take away with us and use to target these economic factors. I am sure that with your expertise we will be able to devise such measures. Speaking of expertise, let me welcome the private sector representatives who are attending this Forum. Your perspectives will also be invaluable.

(International coordination crucial)

It is only fitting that we should be discussing these issues within the OSCE. If we want to fight trafficking networks and the forces that drive them we should pit our own 'network' against theirs. Our network of multilateral organisations such as the OSCE that enable us to share information and overcome constraints of sovereignty and national borders. We cannot make progress acting alone. That is true not only for individual governments but for the OSCE as well. We must link our strategies to those of the UN, which is particularly active when it comes to fighting drugs trafficking. The OSCE can provide special expertise in the areas of trafficking in small arms and light weapons and trafficking in human beings. Because the OSCE has tremendous added value. It can address many different aspects of these problems in a coordinated manner and the region it covers is vast.

The fight against trafficking in human beings, in particular, will draw on that added value. We have recognised human trafficking as one of the most pressing and complex human security issues in the OSCE region and I hope that a strong, new Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings will be adopted shortly. That means that we should all put into practice the commitments that we have made on the international level. For instance, including human trafficking in our penal codes or signing and ratifying the Palermo Protocol. The OSCE can assist in the process of drafting legislation.

(Suggestions for concrete measures)

But there is more to be done. As Chairman-in-Office, I would like to take the issue of the fight against human trafficking a bit further. Allow me to kick off the debate here in Prague with some suggestions for concrete measures that we could agree on and that would help us fight the three forms of trafficking that I have mentioned.

First, we should consider Special Mechanisms that can give the necessary impetus to our joint efforts and that could also ensure a degree of continuity. The nomination of a *Special Representative* for instance, could well suit both those purposes. On a political level, he or she could help countries both east and west of Vienna to strengthen their political commitment and to implement the anti-trafficking measures we agreed on. For instance, such a Representative could have a strong role in monitoring and encouraging the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, once it is adopted. In close cooperation with the various OSCE institutions and drawing on their expertise, he could also send 'roving missions' of experts to points both east and west of Vienna, where they would pool their expertise in different areas.

But given that we are in for a long fight, it is also important for us to safeguard the continuity of our efforts. A Special Representative could see to it that the fight against the various forms of trafficking remains a top priority for the OSCE. This is a matter that the Netherlands feels strongly about and we will do all we can to provide a share of continuity ourselves when we assume the Chairmanship of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers and the Presidency of the European Union in the next year and a half.

A second suggestion that I wish to put to you is the development of *public-private partnerships*. Whether through Codes of Conduct or otherwise, we should make use of the fact that in certain areas the private sector may very well be able to regulate itself. The results in the transport and chemical industries look hopeful. I am referring to transport firms that use special screening mechanisms for detecting illegal transports of human beings, chemicals or drugs. Companies have already taken a number of initiatives of this kind to undermine the illegal trade in people, weapons and drugs. I believe this is a route that we need to explore further, always with the same conviction: trafficking is a global problem that affects us all – citizens, businesses and governments alike.

There are plenty of other measures that we could think of in our fight against trafficking. They do not necessarily have to involve regulation or legislation. The victims of human trafficking in particular require our most urgent attention. We should not overlook simple but potentially very effective ways of addressing their needs. One example might be an *international hotline* throughout the OSCE region. It would allow victims or potential victims to call for help or to disclose criminal networks unknown to the authorities. Technically, it appears to be possible to interconnect twenty-four OSCE countries in this way and this could perhaps be extended to all OSCE countries. And on a more fundamental level: an international hotline would help to decriminalise the victims of human trafficking and at the same time give them a direct lifeline to the authorities.

(Conclusion)

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. The fight against trafficking needs input from all of you. It requires creative thinking as well as a readiness to overcome the boundaries of sovereignty and the like. If we are serious about winning this fight then we must deliver sustainable results. This Economic Forum, with its focus on the roles of the private sector, of governments and of the OSCE is in my opinion based on the right assumptions: that the problem of trafficking affects us all, that we all therefore have a stake in the fight against it, and that we can only win that fight in the long run by working together.