



## Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Special Representative and Co-ordinator  
for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

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ECPAT International and ILO/IPEC - Europe and Central Asia Regional Preparatory Meeting for the III World Congress against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, 17 September 2008, Geneva

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I would like to thank the organizers, in particular ECPAT and ILO/IPEC, for inviting me to address this very important occasion, since the eradication of child trafficking is the most important priority in my agenda and a subject upon which we find little disagreement when discussing trafficking in human beings. Even so, we still have a long way to go between rhetoric and ACTION. I would like to take this opportunity not only to share the examples of good practice from our experience in the OSCE region covering Europe, Central Asia and North America; but, also, I would like us to reflect in general terms on our experiences since the endorsement in 2003 of the OSCE Action Plan to Combat THB.

Until now, the OSCE Action Plan, the Child Addendum (2005) and the Ministerial Council Decision on Combating Sexual Exploitation of Children (2006) constitute the three most important commitments forming the basis of our work and my mandate to assist the participating States with implementation at national and regional level. (You may like to refer to the copies of these documents which were sent for distribution here today).

We all know that the Convention of the Rights of the Child is one of the most ratified international instruments worldwide; yet ratification is just the beginning of a process, not the end. In my experience as the OSCE Special Representative, international commitments are important tools to be used when raising the political will of governments towards the pursuit of eradication of a major social problem; **but, as a former Minister, I know that success only comes from greater ownership of the problem, and from decisive action aimed at achieving viable solutions at national level.** In our work, we hear a great deal about the lack of knowledge of all the facets involved in THB, or the lack of resources necessary to address this problem. However, to some extent, I feel that authorities have enough information to launch a strong campaign to address this problem, while working hard to engage others in the process. And here I refer not only to donors, but rather to the private sector, which can generate funds, in-kind contributions and human resources, while also owning their part in the

process of addressing this problem; that is, by taking corporate responsibility in creating a prosperous and sustainable community in which children are protected from harm. In this regard, the role of **The Code** as an effective preventive tool in combating sexual exploitation of children in the travel and tourism industry is one of the ultimate examples of best practice, not just in terms of its direct impact at national level, but also because it is an example which can be transferred to many corners of the world, as we have seen in Latin America, South East Asia, South East Europe, Africa, to name just a few.

Concrete engagement between the private and public sector is vital for the sustainability of our efforts in this area. After all, the travel and tourism industry worldwide is a major source of income and development for millions of people. As such, we must work and mutually support each other in our efforts, including identifying and carrying out creative solutions with both formal and informal sectors of the economy. The work on the **Code of Conduct** implemented by ECPAT and its partners was mentioned in the OSCE MC Decision on Sexual Exploitation of Children, which recommends it as a good practice to be implemented by our participating States.

Based on our experience, regional co-operation via the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan and additional political commitments, has constituted a tool for the harmonization of legislation, has contributed to the setting of common standards, and has created a road map to assess the implementation by countries and other stakeholders involved in the process. This course of action can also be achieved by regional processes as we have seen in Europe (European Union), Asia (ASEAN), Africa (ECOWAS) and Latin America (MERCOSUR). A number of voices in our circles recognize the need for greater co-ordination among all stakeholders, including donors; but the reality is that - before co-ordination takes place - collaboration and true partnership must be a vivid motto within our daily work, starting from partnership between countries sharing a common problem, along with agencies aiming at a similar goal. Competition for resources, visibility and priorities is a reality; yet we should aim at minimizing these side-effects if we want to achieve sustainability and avoid donor and public interest fatigue. Our work with the Alliance Expert Coordination Team, representing leading international organizations and NGOs, has provided a platform for consultation, thus functioning as a forum for strategic networking and joint actions in the OSCE region. And here I would like to pay homage to ECPAT, ILO and UNICEF for their on-going support and contributions to the work of the *Alliance*.

Let me highlight that, in our experience, in order for successful regional co-operation to work, there needs to be high-level commitment and representation at both regional and national levels. As such, part of my function is to meet high-level officials, to carry out

country visits, promote dialogue, as well as to gather government representatives in high-level regional meetings under the auspices of the *Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons* in order to advocate for greater political will and promote good practices. **Let me stress here that work MUST be carried out at national and regional level simultaneously, because it is at local level that concrete implementation takes place in order to generate the tangible results we see at regional and international level.** Furthermore, at the local level lies the challenge of ensuring that our actions comply with human rights standards, including the determination of "the best interest of the child". As such, we must work with a multitude of stakeholders, while identifying a clear strategy of where we are and where we are going! And here is where we can affirm that the good practice of establishing national task forces or multidisciplinary co-ordination mechanisms, combined with the development and implementation of action plans, has shown positive results in a number of OSCE participating States in terms of identifying the problem, allocating resources, tasks, roles, etc.

Provided we have the right elements in place, regional approach can create dynamism for positive change; yet we may also caution against a process which could generate a set of agreed standards that are merely minimum denominators or worse. Beautiful wording without much action. Consequently, monitoring is a key element in regional co-operation, starting from self-monitoring at national level (the gathering and analysis of information), which collectively can contribute to a regional understanding of the problem based on empirical evidence. And in this regard, the OSCE work in promoting the establishment of a national rapporteur or an equivalent mechanism throughout the region can, in the long run, contribute to the process of assessment and evaluation of efforts made. Our experience attests that regional organizations and processes can facilitate the transfer of knowledge and expertise of international standards into national practice through a variety of mechanisms, including exchange of information and networking among government officials. In this connection, we can cite the recent high-level Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons Conference on "Child Trafficking: Responses and Challenges at Local Level" held in May 2008, as a forum for the exchange of information and practices in relation to the OSCE commitments (e.g. victim protection, risk assessment, etc.).

Since THB is an international problem, we need to work across regions by developing cross- or inter-regional co-operation, also because we see a number of interesting regional experiences from which we can learn and which we can adapt to our needs. I notice a great potential to learn from South East Asia; yet we must be ready to adapt instead of simply transpose. In addition, let me emphasize that whenever possible we should strive for synergy of priorities in order to strengthen the message to governments, whilst prioritizing our own efforts. I am pleased to be able to state that

our efforts in showing synergies between the EU and OSCE commitments have borne fruit, as more EU Member States now understand the need to carry out the implementation of similar commitments (for example, the establishment of national rapporteurs, the development of action plans, the paramount importance of addressing victim identification and protection mechanisms, etc.). The inclusion of the main beneficiaries in the dialogue and consultative process is a must. The challenge for governments and agencies alike is how to ensure proper inclusion instead of just indulging in tokenism.

**In conclusion ...** the OSCE, as a regional organization, is a natural forum in which political commitments, regular dialogue and co-operation among countries can contribute to strengthening the exchange of experience and expertise, as well as the implementation of concrete actions. At the same time, the primary responsibility to combat child trafficking remains with the participating States. We must also work to frame this problem within a big picture. Therefore, it is important that future consultation on international migration, development, poverty reduction, gender equality, etc., includes a strong commitment to prevent and eradicate sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. I recognize that there is no shortage of challenges ahead of us on our path to create an environment conducive to harnessing the potential of our children into the large community popularly known as the global village. As such, my main recommendation to the III World Congress is:

- let's aim at just a few, succinct recommendations and resolutions in Rio, and let's work intensively on concrete solutions and the implementation of existing commitments!

**Thank you**