

Vice-President Franco Frattini

European Commissioner responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security

Fighting trafficking in human beings

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Conference on Human Trafficking

Brussels, 19 October 2005

Introduction:

Worldwide, more than one million human beings are trafficked across international borders each year. Of those, it is believed that more than 80 percent are women and girls, and that 70 percent of them were forced into sexual servitude. Mainly girls are exploited every year in the multi-billion dollar sex industry, one third of all girls are subject to coercive sexual relations, one fifth are victims of forced marriages and close to a million were infected last year with HIV.

The United Nations believes that the trafficking of human beings is now the third largest source of money produced by organized crime, after arms and drugs. We have a problem; we need to do something about it.

Sexual exploitation emerges from obvious poverty. No one chooses to submit to a situation of exploitation and slavery

Tackling the growing problem of trafficking requires an international and multidisciplinary approach involving all relevant stakeholders (e.g. NGOs and social authorities, law enforcement and migration authorities). National and international strategies need to be put in place which provide the right instruments for directing and persecuting traffickers and which offer victims protection and the chance to rejoin society.

It is therefore important for me to be here today and to address this conference which brings together all the stakeholders active in combating human trafficking .

I would like also to thank the UK acting Council Presidency and Sweden, as chair of the Nordic Baltic Taskforce against Trafficking in Human Beings, for their close cooperation with the Commission in order to promote and organise this important conference.

This is finally an opportunity to congratulate the Experts Group in trafficking in Human Beings, set up by the Commission in order to ensure a proper implementation of the recommendations of the Brussels Declaration on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

2. Counter trafficking policy .

Prevention of THB, protection of victims and efficient prosecution/punishment of traffickers are the three major cornerstones of my counter trafficking policy. Legislative and non-legislative instruments must be used to that end.

Our proposals on how the EU could step up its fight against human trafficking are contained in the Commission Communication on THB, outlines of which I wish to present to you today.

Communication on THB

The Communication lists and describes a series of action points and measures which could serve as a basis for the action plan on trafficking in human beings required by The Hague Programme.

The aim is to clearly indicate to the Institutions and to the Member States who should do what in the various areas.

It is an-interdisciplinary consisting of some key-elements:

An integrated, human rights based approach to address human trafficking; it will be underlined in regular political debates at Council level about the EU's anti- trafficking policy and its compliance with human rights standards.

Human trafficking must also be addressed as part of organised crime and defined as a clear priority for law enforcement; adequate resources should be allocated to the relevant law enforcement authorities; Eurojust and Europol should be better involved.

Actions should be reinforced in those areas where there are links with migrant smuggling. However, we have to be aware that some of the offenders and the victims are citizens or legal residents of Member States.

Other measures should include a rapid conclusion of the UN Trafficking and Smuggling Protocols by the Community.

All Member States should also finalise the implementation of the two Council Framework Decisions of 2002 on combating human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Moreover, they should speed-up the transposal of Directive 2004/81/EC on the granting of a residence permit to victims of trafficking who cooperate with the authorities, including the Articles on possible access by victims of human trafficking to the national labour market, vocational training and education.

Coordination and cooperation mechanisms should be strengthened at national, European and international level.

EU institutions and Member States should promote gender specific prevention strategies implementing gender equality principles and eliminating the demand for all forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation.

EU institutions and Member States should ensure that the EU anti-trafficking policy reflects a child rights approach based on globally recognised principles, in particular on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. I attach a high priority to this issue.

There are a number of common steps shared by those who become victims of trafficking. At each step it is possible to intervene, to remove the individual from harm, support them and to investigate and prosecute the traffickers.

These steps include their recruitment by traffickers, their transportation by criminal gangs, and their exploitation in more than one country. When they come into contact with the authorities, they are identified, supported and where appropriate returned and reintegrated into society.

The EU and Member States should create the condition, including appropriate structures, to carry out systematic annual assessment of patterns, trend and volume of trafficking in each country of concern, based on a clear and uniform methodology.

□ The EU should monitor and evaluate policy measures and programmes at EU, international and national level in order to determine the possible and real impact of such policies and improve their effectiveness.

It is evident that no single country, nor institution or agency alone will be able to diminish the problem of human trafficking. On the contrary: coordination on all aspects in the combat against human trafficking and absolute cooperation on everything is indispensable, if we wish to be successful.

Cooperation at the regional and international level is essential if trafficking networks are to be dismantled. Transnational crime has become more prevalent and serious today than ever before, at least in the public's perception, and has a pressing international issue.

The scope of the problem is enormous and criminals are becoming more and more brutal and sophisticated in their methods.

I am determined, as are my colleagues in the Commission, to ensure that each action taken by our institutions in the field of combating trafficking in human beings will respect the fundamental rights as laid down in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and provide for the appropriate balance between Freedom and Security.

Conclusion:

Trafficking in human beings in Europe is not a new phenomenon. It started in the early seventies and has been steadily on the increase ever since, particularly when Eastern European countries opened their borders after the fall of the iron curtain. However, in the past few years the problem has taken on another dimension due to globalisation.

We are all aware of the complexity of the problem and we agree that numerous contributing factors have to be taken into account in order to find a sustainable response to this appalling, transnational crime.

It is a sad reality that many trafficking victims are young people, sometimes children. All of them are desperate to secure the necessities of life. Instead, their lives are ruined by exploitation rooted in greed.

But the important point here is that there is always, behind this appalling crime, a human face - a human being - which is why trafficking constitutes such a severe assault on our common humanity. Accordingly, it must be seen first and foremost as a human rights problem.

Trafficking in persons constitutes first and foremost a human rights violation. A response to this crime therefore necessitates a strong human rights based, victim-centered approach.

Trafficked persons are entitled to protection, assistance and redress in their own right, regardless of their willingness or capacity to press charges and/or give testimony against their traffickers.