



United States Mission to the OSCE

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As prepared for delivered by Ambassador Williamson
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Mr./Madam Moderator,

Sadly, slavery has not ended. Slavery exists today: people owning other people, enslaving them, exploiting them. Every day more people are coerced into bonded labor; bought and sold. Over 800,000 people are trafficked across borders every year. Half are minors. Eighty percent are female. Millions more are victims of labor and sexual slavery within national borders. Over 12 million people world wide are caught in forced labor; too many within the geographic reach of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Slavery around the world and within the OSCE reach is repugnant, intolerable, and demands more aggressive action.

Although some progress has been made by the OSCE participating States in implementing their commitments under the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, human trafficking remains a challenge for OSCE countries. Trafficking in human beings is a global, multi-dimensional crime that undermines not only human freedom and dignity, but it also endangers human health. Combating human trafficking remains a high priority for the United States, and must be a high priority for all OSCE participating States. Our humanity demands it and our common OSCE commitments obligate us to act.

At the 1991 Moscow Ministerial Meeting OSCE participating States committed to “seek to eliminate...all forms of traffic in women.” At the 1999 Istanbul Ministerial meeting the OSCE went further to commit that “(w)e will undertake measures to...end...sexual exploitation and all forms of trafficking in human beings. In order to prevent such crimes we will, among other means, promote the adoption or strengthening of legislation to hold accountable persons responsible for those acts and strengthen the protection of victims.” Among the 2000 Vienna Ministerial Council decisions was “(r)ecognizing that trafficking in human beings is an increasing problem and convinced of the necessity for the OSCE to enhance its efforts to combat trafficking in human beings throughout the OSCE region, including in conflict and post-conflict situations, and to contribute to national, regional and international anti-trafficking efforts in defense of human rights and the fight against transactional organized crime (r)eaaffirms that trafficking in human beings is an abhorrent human rights abuse and a serious crime that demands a more comprehensive and co-ordinated response from participating States and the international community.” And there are other similar commitments to anti-trafficking. These are commitments we must do better to meet.

The annual Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) issued by the United States in June continues to heighten awareness of the scope of human trafficking globally, while underlining ongoing

efforts to eliminate this modern-day form of slavery. There have been some positive developments since last year worth noting. We are encouraged by the improved anti-trafficking efforts in areas such as victim identification by Cyprus and Belarus. Cyprus has also improved its victim identification efforts as demonstrated by increased human trafficking investigations in the past year, including three cases of potential law enforcement collusion. The Government of Kazakhstan has implemented several significant anti-trafficking laws in recent years, despite not having signed the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Although placed on the watch-list for inadequate efforts to improve victim protection and trafficking-related complicity, we commend Armenia for its implementation of a new law in 2006 that makes human trafficking an independent crime and increases the penalties for trafficking in persons. As a result of this law, Armenia has increased the number of traffickers in prison and enabled the prosecution of its first labor trafficking case.

Regretfully, there have also been some steps backwards over the past twelve months. Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Belarus were placed on the Tier 2 Watch List, a decline from their Tier 2 status in 2006. More needs to be done in Ukraine to prosecute and punish those guilty of trafficking activities. We welcome the launching of numerous efforts over the course of the last year to combat human trafficking by the OSCE Project Coordinator in Ukraine, including a series of regional training courses for Ukrainian police officers that took place within the last few months, seminars for journalists as well as the training of judges and prosecutors, consular officials, lawyers, NGOs and anti-trafficking hotline operators. Belarus needs to make more efforts to protect and assist victims.

Our shared OSCE commitments call upon participating States to adopt legislation in line with international standards. Absent a legal framework, law enforcement efforts to protect human trafficking victims and punish offenders will be ineffectual, and victims will not receive the assistance they need. We call on states such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Moldova that have not yet ratified the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, to do so. Similarly, we urge Uzbekistan, which is considered a country of origin for human trafficking and the largest source of victims from Central Asia, to finalize and adopt legislation to combat human trafficking, including establishing trafficking in persons as an independent crime. We also urge countries to strengthen the legal mechanisms to combat trafficking for forced labor, whose victims have received less attention and protection than other trafficking victims.

The successful prosecution of trafficking cases presents unique challenges because such efforts require significant financial, human, and legal resources. In this respect, coordination among governments, agencies, and non-profit organizations is critical to combating the transnational facet of human trafficking. Because human trafficking victims are frequently transported across international borders, further effort should be directed at improving training in victim identification, travel document authenticity, and border security, in general. In this respect, Armenia has made tangible progress through its work with NGOs and international organizations to train border officials to identify indicators of trafficking. Belarus also should be commended for its efforts to open a new trafficking training center to provide law enforcement officials with victim identification and victim referral training.

The prevalence of corruption among government and law enforcement officials in some states is in part a manifestation of insufficient commitment by some governments, which undermines anti-trafficking efforts. Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Moldova should step up

efforts to address suspected corruption and improve efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict official government complicity in trafficking. During the past year, several trafficking cases in Armenia involved allegations of senior-level government corruption, but there were no convictions for trafficking-related offenses. Thirty-two Kazakhstani police officers were investigated in 2006 for issuing fraudulent documents, but no officials have been convicted for acts related to trafficking. Similarly, although several senior Moldovan Government actors were accused of trafficking activities in 2006, no efforts were made to investigate or prosecute these officials.

Effectively addressing the root causes of trafficking, such as poverty, unemployment, and discrimination against women also are important facets in combating human trafficking. Reports indicate that unemployment and poverty account for a significant number of trafficking incidences in Uzbekistan. In Armenia, both men and women are trafficked for forced labor, while an International Organization for Migration (IOM) report asserts that 38 percent of trafficked persons assisted by IOM in Belarus were male victims of forced labor. If the underlying factors that make people vulnerable to traffickers are not addressed, the victims are likely to be re-trafficked in a continuing cycle of abuse.

Finally, I would like to turn to a serious crime related to trafficking: sexual exploitation of children, particularly on the internet. As use of the internet has grown exponentially around the world, so have internet sites that provide photos and videos – sometimes even real time. These children are often victims of trafficking. In addition, children are often trafficked for sex tourism. Last year the Brussels Ministerial adopted new commitments for our governments to step up efforts to stop these crimes. We look forward to the upcoming Supplemental Human Dimension Implementation Meeting on the subject.

As stated in a recent report from the OSCE office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, “Considering that traffickees and their accomplices are getting more and more brutal and, at the same time, more sophisticated in their methods and are constantly changing their modus operandi, it is of crucial importance to be able to follow developments over the years, in order to identify trends and to adjust and fine-tune the counter-measures.” And as Joschka Fishcer said a few years ago, “The problem is not a new one. However, it has taken on alarming proportions in recent years, occurring in new and even more pernicious guises, sadly particularly in Europe.” The cycle of trafficking must be broken through greater efforts at countries of origin and of destination. Also required are greater victim’s protections.

So we must be attuned to changes in trafficking. We must be agile in our counter measures. And we must be forceful in our actions in countries of origin and of destination. Modern slavery, the forced trafficking in human beings for exploitation, must be brought to an end in our time. That must be our aspiration, our commitment and our common cause.

Thank You.