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Latest Developments and Challenges in the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings in the OSCE Area

When they hear of trafficking in human beings, many people – and, unfortunately, many authorities – think in the first place of prostitutes, economic immigrants, illegal aliens, and unregistered workers, in short, “suspect” people of all kinds. In truth, however, we are dealing here with the victims of serious crime, human beings who, as a result of abduction, fraud, deception, or coercion have ended up in situations similar to slavery, where they are subject to brutal violence, locked up, intimidated, and exploited in the sex industry, as household servants, used as cheap labour, and in other forms of forced labour or services.

Unfortunately, these facts are still overlooked, while disproportionately intensive efforts are expended on dealing with questions of national security, such as border control and border security, combating illegal immigration (including people smuggling), and reducing and controlling migration, and these are frequently seen through the magnifying glass of the struggle against organized crime.

It is true that trafficking in persons has garnered increasing international attention in recent years, following the passing of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. For the first time, laws have been made specifically to combat human trafficking, funds for projects and programmes aimed at tackling the phenomenon have begun to flow, and more and more governments, organizations, and individuals have started to deal more intensively with the problem. A growing number of actors are now involved in the fight against trafficking in human beings. And more commentators, researchers, and experts than ever are creating knowledge and disseminating information on this topic. Nonetheless, despite all these activities, there is still no sign of a substantial decline in human trafficking, which is precisely why we need to apply ourselves to this question.

Why Is Trafficking in Human Beings not Declining despite Years of Attention?

We can find some answers by examining more closely the assumptions we have made in our struggle so far. I believe that we will make no progress of note against human traffickers and will not be able to provide their victims with the assistance they need as long as we do not deal with these questions directly and openly.

Although there is widespread recognition that human trafficking is a grievous crime and a massive infringement of human rights, and although this is continually and forcefully reiterated by representatives of governments around the entire globe, measured by their deeds, most countries appear to have a rather restricted understanding of human trafficking, one based almost exclusively on concepts of national security and national sovereignty.

The Security-Based Approach to Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

If we consider the standard practice in many European and other destination countries, it becomes evident that protecting the fundamental rights of the victims of human trafficking is subordinated to the interests of the state. Governments claim they want to combat human trafficking while nonetheless seeing tackling illegal immigration as their top priority. As a rule, the EU and many West European and other destination countries consider their key task to be containing and preventing illegal immigration and combating abuse of the asylum system.

International co-operation on questions of human trafficking has also recently tended to concentrate on tightening border security and preventing irregular immigration. To this purpose, an increasing number of readmission and repatriation agreements have been signed and implemented, and other restrictive measures passed. As a result, victims of human trafficking run the risk of being treated as illegal immigrants and summarily deported to their countries of origin. Even if victims are granted a temporary right to remain, the support they receive depends on whether they have a role to play in a criminal prosecution and are willing to co-operate with law enforcement agencies. The victims are thus frequently treated as means to an end by the legal system, and this is one more case where their rights to protection of their physical and mental integrity are made secondary to the interests of the state.

A key element of this approach, which is oriented primarily towards national security, is border control. It is seen as *the* means with which to tackle human trafficking. However, for a number of reasons – which are discussed in greater detail below – it cannot be the only, or even the most important, element in an effective strategy to counter human trafficking. Very few cases of human trafficking can be or are in fact detected at borders. One reason for this is that the people being trafficked frequently do not yet know of the fate that awaits them, i.e. that they are about to be tricked and enslaved by traffickers and their accomplices. Experience shows that most future trafficking victims cross national frontiers legally and only later become illegal immigrants, e.g. on expiration of their visas. The traffickers often ensure that their victims arrive alone, supplied with valid travel documents, which are then taken off them on arrival in the country of destination. Thus, the stand-

ard reaction of many states – cracking down on fraud, making travel documents forgery proof, stepping up identification procedures, and training border personnel in detecting false documents – may be relevant to identifying illegal immigrants; it has, however, no role to play in a reasonable and effective course of action to deal with the key aspect of human trafficking, namely the exploitation and enslavement of people.

Since individual criminals usually facilitate the transportation and illegal border crossing of potential victims, making border crossing more difficult does little to scupper the plans of traffickers as a whole. At best, it can cause annoying disruptions or put individual drivers or smugglers out of operation for a while. These individuals do play a role in the human-trafficking chain, but they are not decisive for the trade as a whole. Moreover, by stressing border security, this approach ignores the growing phenomenon of domestic human trafficking.

Border officials and civil authorities can attempt to eliminate people smuggling, but their efforts are not directed at its most essential aspect, which is a matter of deceit, coercion, and exploitation. While smuggling people across borders can be seen as a violation of national sovereignty, trafficking in human beings is a serious crime against an individual, and an infringement of his or her human rights. The concept of “securing the borders” – which is often presented as the only real solution and implemented as such – is ineffective as the central instrument in fighting trafficking in human beings. There are many good reasons for tightening a country’s border security; such efforts, however, will not strike at the heart of human trafficking.

We need to recognize that mechanisms used to keep people out and to control who comes in cannot put an end to human trafficking. As currently practiced, the detection, deterrence, and immediate repatriation of victims is frequently the start of a vicious circle.

We must realize that a national policy that aims above all at self-protection rather than taking a comprehensive approach is counterproductive and itself part of the problem. The Western European states, which are the most important destination countries in Europe, thus have a crucial role to play, as do other destination countries.

Trafficking in human beings differs from people smuggling and illegal immigration in fundamental ways. It therefore requires its own dedicated measures in the areas of detection, prosecution, and prevention.

Migrants – and undocumented illegal migrants in particular – are certainly the group most at risk from human traffickers. Many work under conditions of the most blatant exploitation: They receive no medical care and are not informed of their rights; they are subject to physical and mental abuse; and they receive a pittance, which may be paid directly to middle-men. Traffickers make good use of the complete absence of social and legal protections. The fact that migration and organized crime are frequently thought to

be interlinked has further negative repercussions on the ways in which the victims of human trafficking are seen and treated.

A more detailed analysis confirms fears that, in practice, the interests of states – with their focus on controlling migration and prosecuting illegal immigrants – directly conflict with the rights and needs of the victims of human trafficking. The defenceless victims of cynical human traffickers are all too often still seen as criminals, arrested, and deported before the facts are investigated.

The Law Enforcement-Based Approach to Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

At present, almost all of those recognized as victims of human trafficking have been identified as such by the police. The extent to which people are identified as victims depends upon the familiarity the police have with the problem. Their level of awareness determines whether the victims will be treated appropriately. Finally, the police also determine whether there will be a criminal prosecution, as it is their task to interview the victims and create a crime file.

These facts already illustrate several burning issues in the struggle against trafficking in human beings: Cases of human trafficking and the fates of the victims are usually in the hands of the police – rather than the victims being given the opportunity to turn to a network of contact points and support agencies that will protect them from being delivered over to the legal and criminal machinery of a strange country. Studies show that victims of human trafficking rarely see the police as a potential source of protection and help.

The police also still often use interrogation techniques that seek to extract information by devious means. It is often also argued that a statement made immediately after arrest tends to be true and unadulterated, as the questioned person has had no chance to adjust his or her story or to plan a strategy. Victims of human trafficking are often arrested and taken into custody for this purpose.

In contrast, however, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work with the victims of human trafficking have recognized that, after their traumatic experiences, they need time for physical and mental recovery and reflection and that they need to develop trust in foreign authorities and institutions. At first, they often do not see themselves as the victims of crime and it takes time and considerable discussion before they understand their situation. In addition, the victims are often urged by their traffickers to trust nobody – especially not the police. They are sometimes also ashamed of what they have had to do – e.g. to work as prostitutes – and may even blame themselves. NGOs and international organizations thus take the view that the victims will tend only to relate their stories accurately and to tell the whole truth

after some time has been allowed to pass. Before they can discuss their experiences and reliably bear witness, they need have undergone a process of extensive contacts and regular discussions. The lesson we learn from this is that the identification of victims of human trafficking should not be left to the police. It would be far better if this were carried out as a collaborative effort between law enforcement agencies and NGOs.

In many countries, there is no organized and systematic co-operation between the police and NGOs running centres for the protection of victims of trafficking. This is significantly to the disadvantage of the victims. Co-operation between the police and the state prosecution service frequently also leaves much to be desired. The OSCE and our partners in the Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons therefore call for the establishment of national referral mechanisms (NRMs), i.e. national mechanisms for victim protection and co-operation, which would enable the improvement and institutionalization of co-operation both on a domestic level and especially between states.

We must free ourselves of the outdated view that the rights and needs of the victims of human trafficking are incompatible with effective law enforcement. We need to recognize that it is unrealistic and ultimately unacceptable to see a contradiction between prosecuting the perpetrators and supporting and protecting the victims of these crimes.

For this reason, it is essential to create awareness that trafficking in human beings is not only a question of law enforcement but also one of human rights – there is no either/or. Both issues need to be addressed together if we are to succeed in our struggle against trafficking in persons.

Comprehensive training is essential to meet the ongoing requirement to improve global awareness of human trafficking. Intensive training should be provided to everyone involved in law enforcement: from front-line police and special investigators to state prosecutors and judges. Training should also be offered to border officials and consular employees, and to government officials in key positions.

Providing the necessary education and training to all who require it is a major undertaking, but it is the only way of achieving the desired result. A concrete plan should thus be drawn up, detailing precisely who is to receive training and when. Team teaching, in which training is given by teams of instructors consisting of police officers and representatives of NGOs, have proved extremely effective and have raised educational and training standards.

A further factor that can help to overcome the terminological confusion is criminal law reform, which has begun in several states. As soon as countries start to attempt to get a handle on the problem of legally discriminating between trafficking in human beings and people smuggling, illegal immigration, prostitution, and assorted other offences, they find it necessary to create clear and unambiguous definitions of each.

This not only impacts criminal law provisions, it also affects victim support and witness protection measures. The differences between trafficking in human beings, people smuggling, and illegal immigration also become clearer when countries need to decide what services they would like to and will be able to provide to victims of human trafficking that they will not provide to smuggled persons and illegal immigrants – and on what grounds.

All this will increase understanding in this area. Police and justice officials, whose task it is to enforce the law, follow it to the letter. That is why new laws need to be enacted specifically to deal with trafficking in human beings. Moreover, the laws that are enacted must be comprehensive enough to take account of the multidimensional character of this grievous crime and the serious infringement of human rights that trafficking in human beings entails.

The Human Rights-Based Approach to Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

The preceding considerations make it clear that particular attention needs to be paid to the legal status of the victims and to their protection. States have an essential role to play here, especially as regards the treatment of the victims. When the affected persons and their immediate family are in safety, they will be more likely to co-operate with the prosecution of those who trafficked them, thereby helping to investigate and destroy their networks.

In order to break free of those who would use violence on them and living conditions in which the threat of violence is constant, victims of human trafficking require considerable social and economic support. They also need legal assistance. The provision of legal status to victims of human trafficking is an especially important element of any effective victim and witness protection strategy. A guaranteed legal status that offers security to the victims is the key precondition if they are to be reached by support programmes.

A central question in this context is that of the victims' right to remain (temporarily or permanently) in destination or transit countries. Ideally, victims of trafficking should be granted a right to remain irrespective of their ability or willingness to testify in criminal proceedings. Alongside residency rights, they should also be granted access to the labour market, and a right to state benefits and to reparations for the crimes that have been committed against them.

The status of victims of human trafficking in criminal proceedings demands particular attention. They should have the right to refuse to give evidence, and, if they are willing to testify, they should be able to do so in a non-confrontational environment. At the very least, it must be made absolutely certain that when they do give evidence they do not become victims for the second time, but instead find the process a positive, strengthening experience.

In practice, many states do not even provide victims that co-operate with criminal proceedings with even the most basic protection. Many countries do not grant witnesses a right of residency for the duration of the proceedings but rather require them to return for the trial – regardless of the costs involved and the safety of the victims and their families.

Of course, effective witness and victim protection does not end with the conclusion of criminal proceedings. Studies have shown that victims and the families they have left behind in their countries of origin are often left without protection and find themselves at the mercy of traffickers and their accomplices, who use or threaten violence. Victims' families should therefore also be granted a right to reunification. This is often the only way to ensure the safety of the nearest relatives of victims of human trafficking.

Although this problem has started to receive increasing attention in the political arena, there are few states that have concluded that it is *their* task to protect people from human trafficking and the human rights violations that go with it, as well as to provide victims with adequate support and legal means. Individual states and governments bear the chief responsibility for the implementation of measures to combat trafficking in human beings. They are responsible for fulfilling their human rights obligations under international law, i.e. to guarantee and protect the rights of each individual. While everyone can contribute to solving this problem, the ultimate responsibility for appropriate and effective countermeasures lies with the individual governments. Each government needs to face up to its responsibility and make itself accountable if we are to make progress in the struggle against trafficking in human beings.

Despite the tangible progress that has been made in creating formally institutionalized national mechanisms in many countries, there are few signs that governments are recognizing and accepting this responsibility as their own, particularly in relation to supporting and protecting victims of trafficking. Although this issue has been dealt with extensively in conferences and in the media, in practice, many states in the OSCE area do not devote the time or attention to it that it deserves. If we were to consider objectively what needs to be done to deal with the problem, we would realize that human trafficking requires our full and undivided attention. Nonetheless, there are few officials whose work is exclusively devoted to tackling the wide range of tasks associated with combating human trafficking.

Instead, governments – especially in countries that can rely on receiving financial support from donor countries – transfer responsibility for the implementation of activities in the fight against human trafficking to international organizations. That has decisive consequences. When action is needed, governments often step back from the edge rather than confronting the problem and becoming involved. But international organizations can never do all that is necessary to pursue this struggle, whose core issue is the protection of the human rights of citizens – one of the fundamental tasks of the state.

States also have an important role in determining how victims of human trafficking are perceived. By treating them appropriately, they can ensure that they are seen as the victims of crime. They must be accorded the legal status and protections appropriate to victims of serious crime and should not be treated as criminals. States have to ensure that trafficking victims are neither prosecuted nor punished under criminal or administrative law for acts arising in connection with their situation as trafficked persons. Governments should therefore refrain from summarily deporting those who may be victims of human trafficking on account of their status as illegal immigrants or unregistered workers.

The Multidimensional Nature of the Struggle against Trafficking in Human Beings

Trafficking in human beings cannot be represented by means of a single “snapshot”, but only as a series of pictures like a film. It does not occur at a particular moment, which is then over, and it does not transpire in a single location. It does not only take place in the destination country, where the victim or a perpetrator is discovered. Rather, it consists of a chain or series of criminal acts and human rights violations, starting in the country of origin and stretching over a period of time through various transit countries to the country of destination. Domestic trafficking in human beings also consists of a protracted series of criminal acts and human rights violations.

Recognizing that human trafficking consists of a series of criminal acts and prosecutable activities is a basic prerequisite for effectively combating it. Without this insight, and as long as anti-trafficking measures are not based upon these facts, there can be no effective response to human trafficking – neither in terms of prosecuting the perpetrators, nor in helping the victims.

The recognition that human trafficking consists of a chain of criminal acts makes it essential that law enforcement agencies take an approach that is cross-border, co-operative, and proactive rather than reactive. It also explains why a strategy based on “deterrence” at the border is not effective.

The fact that human trafficking is a cross-border activity is almost a cliché. The problem is that literally no one actually treats it as one in practice. In virtually no investigations of human trafficking cases are criminal activities in the countries of origin connected with law breakers in the destination countries. There are also virtually no institutionalized and co-ordinated efforts to look after the victims once they have been returned to their countries of origin. One of the key priorities therefore needs to be the development of mechanisms that make it possible to target the entire criminal network: from the countries of origin, where it all begins, right up to the “end customers” in the countries of destination. Moreover, these mechanisms need to be applied

across the board: to politics, law enforcement, NGOs engaged in victim support, and to justice systems.

Finally, the above observations show that, time and time again, a highly complex, multidimensional problem is reduced to an oversimplified, one-dimensional view in the search for quick fixes. Everyone with practical experience of dealing with the problem has recognized how incredibly complicated and difficult the whole puzzle is. The attempt to reduce the multiple dimensions to a single aspect can never lead to sustainable solutions. Some see human trafficking purely as a problem of illegal immigration, others consider it an issue concerning only the job market, some frame it as a problem determined entirely by the existence of a certain demand, and yet others look on it as only a question of organized crime. All these approaches suffer from tunnel vision. They completely ignore the complexity of the real situation, which makes them incapable of producing the desired results.

If we wish to be successful in fighting this scourge of humanity, we will require a truly comprehensive approach – one that covers every conceivable arena of activity. It is necessary to combine the efforts of all those who provide practical assistance in fighting poverty, in education, and in defence of human rights with those who deal with issues such as corruption and organized crime, or questions such as immigration and legal reform.

Just as we need to recognize that no country, no ministry, and no organization or agency can bring about an end to this horrific violation of human rights by itself, we must be aware that no one-dimensional approach can succeed either. The OSCE and our Alliance partners therefore appeal tirelessly to governments and other local stakeholders in relevant countries to put anti-trafficking measures in place that tackle the problem comprehensively, in all its many facets – attacking both its roots and the criminality that is symptomatic of it, establishing penalties for the perpetrators that correspond to the grievousness of their offences, and, most importantly, meeting the needs of the victims.

The Economic Dimension in the Struggle Against Trafficking in Human Beings

There can be no doubt that trafficking in human beings has its roots in the increasing poverty affecting many countries where victims of trafficking originate – especially the poverty of the female population (“feminization of poverty”). It is usually poverty, frequently in combination with political instability, that creates an environment where human trafficking can flourish, feeding not only the international sex industry, but also the markets for forced labour and services, household servants, children forced to work as beggars or thieves or otherwise abused, forced marriage, the organ trade, and so on.

Informal economic activity and flourishing black markets have become vital elements in the economies of many transition countries. The precarious employment this brings has become one of the most important sources of money for low-income groups, such as women. The reform process has failed to deliver regular employment to many people, instead forcing them into the informal sector and occasional jobs.

The most alarming consequences of this widespread poverty include corruption, white-collar crime, and organized crime – including trafficking in human beings. These have not only grown to a terrifying size, but they themselves act to destabilize and delay the ongoing development of institutional and economic structures.

The liquidation of entire sectors of the economy and the fact that international financial organizations attach conditions to structural adjustment loans that necessitate the elimination of vital social services may contribute directly or indirectly to human trafficking. The creation of illegal job markets entails a risk that people gradually drift into contact with the criminal world of human trafficking. We all know that – despite relatively high unemployment in many Western countries – irregular migrants can easily find work in the unprotected low-wage sector. That creates a need for more socially balanced economic programmes. The challenge lies in fighting on all fronts for economic development *and* social protection for all.

There is no alternative to tackling this problem at its roots, however complex, difficult, and apparently insurmountable it may be. Initiatives in the struggle against trafficking in human beings need to offer real opportunities to break the cycle of poverty, abuse, and exploitation.

If we want to end the traffic in human beings, we need to implement both short-term and long-term measures. On the one hand, the countermeasures have to take effect quickly. At the same time, we must also address the structural causes – namely the global imbalance in the distribution of work, resources, and wealth.

OSCE Mechanisms to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings

While much has certainly been done in the fight against human trafficking and efforts continue, a great deal of work still lies ahead.

The OSCE is well positioned to tackle this problem in all its complexity: Not only does human trafficking fall within the Organization's remit, the OSCE also includes countries of origin, transit, and destination among its participating States. Trafficking in human beings touches upon questions of human rights and the rule of law, law enforcement and the fight against crime, inequality and discrimination, corruption, economic exclusion, and migration. It cuts across all the dimensions of the OSCE's work and therefore demands a decisive and cross-dimensional approach.

Our answer to this steadily growing problem must be interdisciplinary and international. We are dealing with a transnational crime, and to combat this global problem, we need an approach that is co-ordinated at the national, regional, and international levels. Countries of origin, transit, and destination must work together if tangible progress is to be made.

During the Dutch OSCE Chairmanship in 2003, the fight against trafficking in human beings was declared one of the Organization's key priorities. The Maastricht Ministerial Council adopted the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings and established an appropriate OSCE mechanism. This consists of a Special Representative on Trafficking in Human Beings, who was appointed by the Bulgarian Chairmanship in May 2004, and the Anti-Trafficking Assistance Unit (ATAU), which supports the work of the Special Representative.

The responsibilities of the Special Representative are defined in Decision No. 2/03 of the Maastricht Ministerial Council (Combating Trafficking in Human Beings) of 2 December 2003. The main focus of my work is to assist participating States in implementing relevant OSCE and other international commitments, for instance, those that can be derived from the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons.

The OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings provides the participating States with a diverse range of instruments to fulfil these commitments. It takes a comprehensive view of the problem, dealing with preventive activities, victim protection, and the prosecution of those who perpetrate or support these crimes. It contains recommendations to the participating States and the relevant OSCE institutions, structures, and field presences on appropriate means for dealing with the political, economic, legal, and humanitarian aspects of the problem.

The OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings is the foundation of my work as OSCE Special Representative, the greatest challenge of which consists in turning theory into practice. I am therefore concentrating in the first instance on working with governments, encouraging them to live up to their responsibilities, and to become active in the struggle against human trafficking. I see it as my task to offer governments assistance in decision making with regard to their policies on human trafficking, and to advise them on related matters. Solutions should be developed that encourage an intensification of cross-border co-operation but are geared to the needs of individual states and accord with international standards. I also offer my support for the establishment of national structures necessary for effective domestic and transnational co-operation.

In my efforts to cover the entire human-trafficking chain, I encourage governments and other local stakeholders to see trafficking in human beings as a continuum – from the countries of origin, via the transit countries, to the countries of destination.

Raising awareness of the problem and its complexity, and advising on appropriate ways to deal with it – i.e. ways that encompass all areas and aspects – will naturally remain key aspects of my work.

It is of great importance that all dimensions of human trafficking be taken into account, i.e. trafficking for sexual exploitation, for exploitation in the form of forced labour or services – including as household servants – trafficking into forced marriages, trafficking in organs, and especially trafficking in children. With the support of the ATAU, I prepare background information on these issues and on best practices for achieving sustainable results in the fight against human trafficking.

A key aspect of my work is to ensure effective collaboration between all the actors and other stakeholders, including governmental authorities, law enforcement officials, and NGOs, not to mention international organizations, who contribute specialist expertise and knowledge.

Co-operation with OSCE institutions and field presences, especially with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Strategic Police Matters Unit (SPMU), the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA), the Senior Advisor on Gender Issues, and the Anti-Trafficking Focal Points in the Missions, is a further vital part of my work. It enables me to co-ordinate the various activities undertaken in the fight against human trafficking and to ensure they are built on a common foundation. Because of the important role parliamentarians play in framing legislation relevant to human trafficking, I place great value on co-operation with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

The Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons

Bearing in mind that co-operation and co-ordination are the keys to sustainable solutions in the fight against trafficking in human beings, I have established close links with relevant international actors – the “Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons”.

The Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons is the banner for collective efforts being undertaken with important international partners. It illuminates the problem’s many aspects and complements existing efforts at co-ordination between the OSCE and its structures, on the one side, and other international, intergovernmental, and non-governmental organizations. The Alliance was established with a view to developing joint effective strategies, and, above all, to provide all the OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation with harmonized means of problem solving and decision making. It is a forum for the discussion and development of suitable countermeasures to apply to each of the links in the human-trafficking chain and to the problem as a whole. The inaugural meeting of the Alliance, with an agenda that reflected the many-sided nature of the problem, was held in July 2004.

The provision of support and protection to the victims of human trafficking is a central point that is still frequently neglected – often out of fear of abuse. This question was therefore made the subject of a meeting of national and international experts in February 2005 entitled “Taking a Stand: Effective Assistance and Protection to Victims of Trafficking”. Trafficking in children, which is a particularly grave form of human trafficking, was dealt with at a high-level conference in March 2005. Trafficking in children – for sexual exploitation, forced labour, exploitation in various criminal activities, adoption, or organ transplants – is a major cause for concern and creates a particular challenge. The intention of the conference, which was organized under the aegis of the Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons, was to encourage in-depth discussion of and co-ordinated action to tackle this burning issue, and to set in motion a process of dialogue between OSCE participating States on how trafficking in children can be stopped and the specific support and protection needs of children met. The conference helped to formulate an Addendum to the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings designed to address the special needs of child victims of trafficking, which was adopted at the Ministerial Council in Ljubljana in December 2005.

In the second half of 2005, a high-level conference considered the problem of trafficking for “labour exploitation: forced and bonded labour”. The idea was to stimulate deeper reflection and co-ordinated action in tackling this specific dimension of human trafficking and to establish a dialogue with and among the OSCE participating States on how to dismantle the structures underlying trafficking for forced and bonded labour.

The goal of these conferences is to provide high-quality practice-oriented background information to governments as an aid to decision-making in the formulation of anti-trafficking strategies.

Fact-finding missions in all OSCE States are a vital means of combating human trafficking and shed light on what is actually being done in each country and what progress the governments are making in implementing their commitments. They also provide me with the opportunity to encourage states to take an effective approach to creating the necessary structures and to support the implementation of sustainable measures in the struggle against human trafficking. Country visits often also support the creation of comprehensive national action plans.

Personal contacts and the direct exchange of opinion have proved extremely valuable even in the age of easy global communication. Participation in international forums and national and regional conferences is essential to strengthen these contacts and to raise the profile of the OSCE’s work in the fight against trafficking in human beings.

A first annual report will detail the progress made by the participating States in combating trafficking in human beings and will list the factors that stand in the way of lasting solutions and obstruct the implementation of effective countermeasures.