

Alliance against Trafficking in Persons Conference
Trafficking in Children and the Best Interests of the Child
Rede HGS
3. April 2017 - 14:30

Thank you Madina, dear Special Representative,
Mr. Secretary-General, dear Lamberto,
Father Czerny,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Austria has taken over the OSCE Chairmanship at a critical moment. Everywhere we look there are grave threats to peace and security, be it crisis and destruction in places like in and around Ukraine; serious violations of international law and signs of increasing nationalism; or radicalisation and terrorism within our societies.

Given these challenges, our Chairmanship is focussing on three priorities:

First, we want to contribute to defusing existing conflicts, also by improving the situation of people in crisis situations,

Second, we want to create a platform to assist States in their efforts to combat radicalization and violent extremism,

And third, we will do what we can to help rebuild trust and confidence between the participating States of the OSCE.

Combating trafficking in human beings is connected to all of these priorities. We can rebuild trust through common actions and, together, we can reduce risk factors in crisis situations, including specific vulnerability in the context of violent extremism and radicalization. Let me mention in this regard that a conference planned for 20 October, which will be organized by the Austrian Chairmanship in cooperation with the OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, will specifically focus on the interlinkages between trafficking in human beings and crisis situations.

Combating trafficking in human beings is an area where we all as participating States have committed ourselves to joint efforts. We know that national efforts alone, however effective, cannot fully tackle the complexity of this crime. The Alliance against Trafficking in Persons is an excellent example of how combined and coordinated efforts based on common goals and with a harmonized approach can achieve better results.

We also know that combating trafficking in human beings has to be tackled cross-dimensionally, and that we need to engage in multi-disciplinary and transnational efforts. That's also where we see our role as Chairmanship-in-Office, which is why we will organize a joint meeting of the three committees in July on the topic of trafficking.

According to the 2016 UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, approximately one in four identified trafficking victims is a child. Given this alarming figure, it is more than pertinent that the Alliance and the OSCE's Special Representative put the focus of this year's conference on this timely topic.

Trafficking in human beings is a heinous crime which not only violates human rights and undermines the rule of law, but essentially breaches all our values. It poses a threat to human security and therefore is of major concern to the OSCE, from a human as well as from a broader security perspective.

Children are particularly vulnerable to violence and exploitation; we must thus enhance and combine our prevention and combatting endeavours to ensure more effective investigations, timely prosecutions and the prompt identification of victims. While doing so, we must always focus on the best interest of the child.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Combating child trafficking has long been a national priority for us. That is why Austria has – under the umbrella of our national Task Force on Combating Human Trafficking, where all relevant authorities as well as civil society come together – established a Working Group solely focused on child trafficking. This group has recently finalised a specific *National Referral Mechanism* for victims. It will be one of the priorities of the Working Group to focus on the implementation of these comprehensive guidelines for the identification and referral of victims by the competent federal and provincial authorities. Other priorities for the months and years to come will include cross-linking of all participating agencies, discussion on a uniform standard of support, care and accommodation of victims of child trafficking and the intensification of training for staff dealing with child and youth welfare in the federal provinces.

Combating trafficking in human beings requires a high degree of coordination through international exchange of information, collaboration on the ground and joint investigations. This rationale also led to the establishment of the Joint Operational Office (JOO) of our Criminal Intelligence Service last year. Earlier today we organized an excursion for law enforcement officers to the JOO in order to provide an insight into how this regional platform for international investigations operates, in order to improve crime detection. I hope your visit will lead to increased international cooperation with the Office.

Let me conclude by expressing my gratitude also for your personal engagement. Although various initiatives and best practices show progress across the areas of prevention, prosecution and protection, considerable work still remains to be done. I'm confident that this Conference and its discussions will help inspire further steps on how best to combat human trafficking in the best interest of the child.

Thank you for your attention.