



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

17th Alliance against Trafficking in Persons

“Trafficking in Children and the Best Interests of the Child”

Opening Remarks by

Amb. Lamberto Zannier, OSCE Secretary General

(Vienna, Hofburg, 3 April 2017)

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons Conference, now in its 17th year. Over the course of my tenure as Secretary General, I have seen how this co-ordination platform has grown in significance, not just for us at the OSCE but for all the organizations represented here today. Year after year, this conference brings together a diverse group of experts, stimulating the joint development of integrated responses to fight human trafficking. Allow me to thank the OSCE Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Ambassador Madina Jarbussynova, and her dedicated team for putting together such an impressive programme.

This year’s topic is particularly timely. According to UNODC, almost one in four victims of trafficking within the OSCE region is a child. Boys and girls are subjected to forced labour, sexual exploitation, early marriage, and organ removal, and forced into begging and criminal activities such as transporting illicit drugs.

Instability in and around the OSCE region creates favourable conditions for organized crime and amplifies the vulnerabilities of children. Although there is growing awareness that crisis situations increase the risks of falling victim to trafficking, evidence suggesting a close correlation between large movements of people and vulnerability to trafficking is still largely disregarded in humanitarian responses.

Of the more than 25,000 children who survived the journey across the central Mediterranean in 2016 – which by the way is double the number who made crossing the previous year – nine out of ten were unaccompanied. Three-quarters of migrant children who came from or travelled through Libya last year said they had experienced violence, harassment or aggression. Most said that they had to rely on smugglers, a practice which leaves many in considerable debt, vulnerable to abuse and susceptible to being further preyed upon by traffickers.

The recent tightening of migration policies has left individuals already on the move unable either to return home from transit countries or to travel onwards. They often resort to illegal means to try to avoid deportation or deprivation, facing a serious risk of being exploited by organised criminal networks. Once again, children – particularly unaccompanied minors – are especially vulnerable.

As the world's largest regional security organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, the OSCE welcomes progress made by the international community in raising awareness and proposing concrete actions to prevent children from human trafficking and protect those who have already fallen victim to this despicable crime. UN Security Council Resolution 2331, adopted last December with unanimous support, is a milestone in strengthening our joint resolve to fighting trafficking in areas affected by conflict and encouraging States to secure the legal status of undocumented refugee children. We fully support the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals aimed at ending the abuse, exploitation and trafficking of children. And we acknowledge the universal relevance of the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which highlights the special needs of children on the move.

OSCE participating States fully endorsed OSCE engagement on migration governance with the adoption last December of a Ministerial Council decision on the Governance of Large Movements of Migrants and Refugees. From our specific regional perspective and based on a human-rights centered approach, we will actively contribute to the upcoming consultations for a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

Given the magnitude of the challenges, I strongly support the Special Representative's plans to strengthen the effectiveness of child protection mechanisms in crisis situations and among people affected by displacement. Child-sensitive anti-trafficking responses must be included in all humanitarian actions in a more systematic way.

Children on the move deserve to be protected from violence, exploitation and abuse throughout their journeys. Reducing the risks of abduction and trafficking also calls for creating more opportunities for regular movement and legal pathways to a safe haven. To prevent the return of trafficking victims to dangerous and even life-threatening situations, governments should revisit their immigration policies and develop up-to-date guidelines for officials.

First responders need to be equipped with the necessary tools to better identify trafficked children at an early stage. That's why the OSCE's pioneering multi-stakeholder simulation training on combating trafficking along migration routes will continue to feature specific scenarios focusing on how best to interview and identify children without parental care, including among migrant and refugee populations.

The Special Representative's fact-finding visits are improving our understanding of the current crisis and informing our tailor-made policy recommendations, capacity-building and awareness-raising initiatives. In 2016, she visited first reception and transit centers for migrants and asylum seekers in Italy, Turkey and Bulgaria. This year, she has already visited first reception centers in Serbia and will be visiting Greece next month to do the same.

I also welcome the efforts of the Special Representative and her team in imparting best practices to staff of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine on how to monitor and report trafficking-related trends in the context of a conflict situation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To more effectively address the multidimensional reality of human trafficking we need to pool our resources. Data sharing and the involvement of a broad coalition of stakeholders, including state institutions and civil society, are cornerstones of sustainable risk mitigation.

Based on unique information gathered at our simulation training in Italy, an analysis will be conducted on how financial investigative data can best be used to dismantle complex transnational criminal syndicates. A study of the challenges facing anti-trafficking NGOs in their daily work, in the provision of services and during their interaction with other anti-trafficking actors will also be conducted.

So I am particularly pleased to see such a wide range of practitioners, social workers and national authorities who have come here today to reaffirm a message of unity in standing against one of the most serious human rights violations and injustices of our times. I look forward to our panellists' recommendations on how we can effectively step-up our mechanism for prevention, prosecution and protection.

Our community can and should take the lead in acting promptly in the best interests of children. We must end impunity for traffickers and render justice to the many child victims of trafficking, who all deserve the prospect of a better life.

I wish all of you a fruitful and engaging conference.

Thank you.