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EIGHTIETH SESSION

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS: UPDATE AND PERSPECTIVES

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Trafficking in persons has become a serious concern for many countries in all parts of the world, regardless of whether they are countries of origin, transit or destination or, as is increasingly the case, a combination of all these. International criminal groups, whose activities often include other forms of illicit trade and smuggling such as drugs and arms, control trafficking in persons on a global scale. In addition to representing a form of abuse of human rights, and labour and migration law, trafficking in persons is a crime, and thus a problem of national and international security.
2. The sheer scale and cost – socially and financially – of this phenomenon have escalated in recent years to levels well beyond the means and capacities of some of the hardest-hit countries hosting victims of trafficking. For the victims, the costs can be very high, even death.
3. The General Assembly of the United Nations created an Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of a Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, including a Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children¹. The Convention will be signed in Palermo, Italy, from 12 to 15 December 2000, and will need 49 ratifications in order to enter into force. The purposes of this Protocol are to prevent and combat trafficking, paying particular attention to the protection of women and children, and to promote and facilitate cooperation among State parties in order to meet this objective.
4. The Protocol defines trafficking in persons as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or the use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”²
5. IOM document MC/EX/INF/58 defined the IOM objective in counteracting trafficking as “to curtail migrant trafficking and to protect the rights of migrants caught up in the practice”. It also elaborated IOM’s main programmatic strategies for achieving the objective, such as seminars and fora, information gathering and research, technical cooperation, information dissemination, return and reintegration activities, and counselling and medical services.

¹ Two other Protocols supplementing the Convention are also to be adopted, namely the “Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Air and Sea”; and the “Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition”.

² In document MC/EX/INF/58 “Trafficking in Migrants: IOM Policy and Responses”, submitted to the Executive Committee at its June 1999 session, trafficking was defined and described basically as a problem of abuse of the human rights of migrants, coercion, criminality and violation of national and international migration regulations. IOM’s working definition of trafficking of 1999 is very close to that which has now been approved in the United Nations’ Protocol, which will thus become the internationally adopted definition.

II. IOM ACTIVITIES

6. Since the presentation of the above document and pursuant to the mandate of the Organization, IOM has actively developed counter-trafficking projects in many parts of the world and established a network of counter-trafficking focal points in each IOM Field Office.³
7. Activities over the last two years have tended to target the most vulnerable group of victims: women and children. There are currently 59 counter-trafficking projects, active or in development, targeting 49 countries in Africa, Asia, Central, Eastern and Western Europe, and Latin America, as well as one global assistance project targeting all developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These activities have responded to individual governments' needs in the fields of awareness raising and capacity building, as well as the protection and assistance of individual victims of trafficking and their return to their countries of origin.
8. In Africa, IOM has carried out the groundwork in raising awareness of the trafficking issue among government authorities and NGOs. It has collected basic information on trafficking and is carrying out more specific research in West Africa. Through participation in international and national gatherings, IOM has also taken up the issue of trafficking in children. Projects to assist and return victims of trafficking are operational in several countries. Regional entities such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have begun to play an important role in helping to curtail irregular migration and trafficking in migrants. IOM works closely with these entities to ensure and strengthen protection of and assistance to migrants and regular migration processes.
9. In Asia, particular attention has been given to subregional experiences and a comprehensive counter-trafficking approach has been developed to cover several countries together. For example, the IOM Mekong initiative includes the assistance, return and reintegration of victims in Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. Training for governmental officials and non-governmental organizations, as well as mass information campaigns on the risks of trafficking, are carried out in several countries. Furthermore, in the Asia and the Pacific region, governments are addressing trafficking through regional processes such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Manila Process, the Bangkok Declaration and the Intergovernmental Asia-Pacific Consultations on Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants (APC). IOM actively participates in these regional efforts, submitting appropriate documentation and advocating regional support for innovative counter-trafficking activities and projects.
10. Through generous donor support, IOM has expanded its counter-trafficking activities in Central, Eastern and Western Europe where many of the victims are *en route* to the West. Mass information campaigns have been successfully carried out, *inter alia*, in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Ukraine. The collection of information, research and research review on trafficking issues has contributed to publications on the issue, the last one being "Migrant Trafficking and Human Smuggling in Europe". Research results provide governments with information on the mechanisms of trafficking, thus enabling them, and IOM, to tailor appropriate

³See Conference Room Paper "List of Counter Trafficking Projects", October 2000, for projects being currently implemented including counter-trafficking mass information campaigns.

responses. Protection for victims of trafficking has been provided in several countries of the region, in coordination with regional institutions and NGOs. This includes shelter and protection services in Albania and Kosovo. Safe, dignified and voluntary return to their countries of origin is offered to persons stranded in transit or destination countries throughout Europe. Regional and comprehensive approaches to counteract trafficking have been initiated, particularly in the Balkans and South Eastern Europe. Regional institutions such as the European Commission and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), among others, have worked with IOM and continue to support its many counter-trafficking activities.

11. In the Americas, the Puebla Process has underlined the importance of combating and preventing irregular migration and trafficking in a coordinated way in the region. IOM's close cooperation with the Puebla Process gives it the unique opportunity to cooperate with all countries concerned. Awareness-raising activities as well as the training of governmental officials, have been carried out in several countries.

III. STRATEGIC APPROACHES

12. Taking stock of this experience accumulated over many years on all continents, IOM can offer a coherent, strategic approach to the multifaceted aspects of trafficking in persons, including :

- **Regional and subregional strategies** – to bring together several countries sharing the same trafficking problems, often also the same traffickers' organizations and victims. This can avoid reinventing the solutions country by country and enhance cooperation among affected countries. These strategies will be established in cooperation with national and regional authorities.
- **Comprehensive, integrated responses** – to *prevent* the phenomenon through information and awareness-raising, *protect* the victims through immediate assistance, shelter, access to services, return and reintegration etc., and *enable* governments and agencies, through technical cooperation, to manage the problem themselves. In this way, IOM addresses the causes and consequences of trafficking and the lack of resources and capacities of many developing or in-transition countries used by traffickers as transit points to the West or North, or as easy entries because of lax border controls.
- **Global, rapid response to stranded persons**, particularly women and children – to assist, via central coordination, with shelter, referrals, medical, returns, anywhere in the world, as the need arises. Government and other donor support is needed to ensure ready funding, without the administrative delays of *ad hoc* fundraising in each case.
- **Reintegration assistance as an integral part of return programmes** – to address the root causes of trafficking and avoid potential re-trafficking of the victims after return. Reintegration elements to be included are, *inter alia*, medical and psychological assistance, security protection, vocational training, job referral, subsidized employment, self-employment and micro credits.

- **HIV/AIDS and STD prevention and assistance** as an integral part of assistance programmes – to address a growing phenomenon among displaced and irregular populations, and avoid additional socio-economic costs for host communities at a further point. These projects will seek to support and strengthen national capacities in this field.
- **Research on trafficking** – compiled and presented in a comparative form, in order to provide a concrete basis for regional and subregional approaches. Regular information gathering will be an integral part of all counter-trafficking projects. To achieve this, the IOM trafficking database and the analysis, dissemination and exchange of information and data will be strengthened.
- **Closer cooperation with NGOs and other intergovernmental organizations** working in the field of counter-trafficking – to make better and more cost-effective use of available resources through a coordinated approach.
- **Enhanced technical cooperation** with countries of origin, transit and destination - for the necessary legal reform at national level, the adoption of appropriate anti-trafficking legislation and the creation of better protection and assistance for victims of trafficking. Equally important, technical cooperation in transit and destination countries without means can help to manage the flow of irregular and trafficked migrants on behalf of other potentially affected countries in the region.
- **Closer cooperation with international and national law enforcement institutions** - to ensure that exchange of information between assistance and law enforcement agencies contributes to prevention, protection and prosecution in this field. Training on trafficking issues provided by IOM to these institutions will be a priority.

13. The above can only be achieved with the continued support of IOM Member States and observers, most of which are affected by the trafficking phenomenon. IOM urges Member States of origin, transit and destination to come together on this issue and negotiate mutually supportive agreements based on the above programmatic elements.