



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSCE Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

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23rd Alliance against Trafficking in Persons Conference
OSCE Secretary General's Opening Remarks
18th April 2023

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor for the OSCE to host the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons, an important annual conference gathering high-level political representatives, national authorities, international and civil society organizations, trafficking survivors and anti-trafficking grassroots activists.

Coming together and joining forces is vital to end trafficking in human beings.

The diversity of stakeholders in this room underlines the fact that this crime affects the *whole* of society and *all* of our societies, and I am proud that the OSCE and its Office of the Special Representative have become a recognized venue and leader on assisting participating States in addressing these challenges.

As the Special Representative mentioned earlier, 2023 marks 20 years since the adoption of the OSCE Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. Today, combatting trafficking remains a top priority for the OSCE.

Despite the progress achieved in the last years, real change is hampered by the escalated conflicts and challenges we face in our region.

The war against Ukraine, for example, has created the largest displacement of people since World War II, and a humanitarian crisis of historic proportions.

One-third of the Ukrainian population has been displaced, predominantly women and children, and that displacement and the vulnerability it fosters come with high risks of exploitation. These circumstances only highlight the urgency of addressing the crime and building robust systems to prevent trafficking in human beings.

The elevated risk for exploitation in the OSCE region today means that “being concerned” about trafficking in human beings is *not enough* - there is a pressing need and obligation to take action. An obligation, which rests with participating States. It is in your streets, shops and servers that the fight against trafficking is being waged.

This is why this year we call on your national leadership to achieve success. It is in your power to prioritize the fight against trafficking in human beings, to end it now.

I call on you, your capitals and parliaments to scale up your action: to improve policies and legislation, to reform anti-trafficking systems and structures, and to invest resources.

Strong national leadership is essential and necessary to overcome the challenges we face. But alone it is not enough. Experience has shown that no country can defeat trafficking on its own. The crime is too complex and too diffuse for anyone to solve it alone.

This is what makes the work of the OSCE so vital. Our broad, multi-dimensional concept of security and diversified set of policies and practices best places the OSCE to help you develop an effective response, encompassing prosecution, protection and prevention.

Our Organization is also a forum where countries of origin, transit and destination can design common strategies to address all stages of the crime - from recruitment, to exploitation. The OSCE can support you in confronting the structural aspects of our societies that allow trafficking to thrive.

Because we need to face it: human trafficking is as embedded in our societies and economies as it has ever been. Its scale is growing, and so is its pervasiveness in our lives. Success in defeating it requires decisive action well beyond traditional criminal justice interventions.

In this regard, one crucial concept the OSCE has championed is the notion of broad-based prevention. In particular, if we want to defeat trafficking, *we need to stop paying for it*. Government, businesses, individuals - we all have a collective responsibility to ensure our money does not contribute to trafficking through the goods and services we purchase. This will help prevent human rights abuses up and down global supply chains, and will promote a more fair economic system. I am proud to say that the OSCE has taken actions within its own supply chains to achieve this goal.

There is so much that the OSCE can offer, starting with hosting this important conversation today and tomorrow. Alliance Conferences like this one are built on years of participating States coming together and agreeing that human trafficking is a common enemy and a common threat in our region. My auspice is that States can build further alignment on this key priority and show national leadership to put this crime to an end.

I wish to thank the OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings has done over the years. I wish to thank other executive structures too, including field operations and ODIHR that in co-operation with the Special Representative's Office have greatly contributed to advancing the OSCE anti-trafficking agenda.

In conclusion, I invite you to benefit from the Alliance Conference as a unique platform to discuss current challenges and identify common strategies for durable solutions.

I thank you.