

reaches out to North Africa and the Near and Middle East. Countries in Asia have been informed about the facilities of this global Customs transit system and their interest has shown that they may well join the TIR Convention in the not too distant future.

With the rapid increase of East-West European traffic and with the emergence of many newly independent countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the TIR system is today faced with new and, to this extent, unprecedented challenges. At the same time Customs authorities are faced with an unparalleled amount of Customs fraud and smuggling as a result of changing political, economic and social situations in many countries in the region and due to often heavily increasing Customs duties and taxes.

The United Nations, as a universal organization, is the depositary of the TIR Convention and provides the framework and the services to administer and, where necessary, adapt the TIR Convention to changing requirements. Past experience has shown that the TIR Convention, as part of the transport facilitation work undertaken within the UNECE, has served the interests of all concerned, Customs authorities and transport operators alike, and there is every reason to believe that it will continue to do so in the future.

TRAFFICKING IN WOMAN AS A FORM OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

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Trafficking in persons is an increasing problem that involves both sexual exploitation and labor exploitation of its victims. Trafficking affects all regions and the majority of countries in the world. The broad term "trafficking in women" encompasses a number of illegal actions, including transnational crime, illegal immigration and violations of labor standards. Trafficking in women is a complicated phenomenon with many forces that affect women's decisions to work abroad. Perhaps the strongest factor is the desperate economic situation, which impacts the availability of satisfactory employment in many countries for women more severely than men. Traffickers prey on women's vulnerable circumstances and may lure them into crime networks through deceit and false promises of decent working conditions and fair pay. Under international law, governments are obligated to protect their citizens from being trafficked, through programs that aim at prevention and the protection of victims. Prevention of trafficking in women requires examining the factors that contribute to the problem as well as providing education to potential victims. Both government and non-governmental programs should identify women who are at-risk for trafficking and provide them with the tools neces-

sary to find work abroad without putting themselves at risk. At the same time, more far-reaching programs that address gender inequalities in the labor market are needed to combat trafficking in women. A comprehensive strategy for combating trafficking must also consider the safety of the victims. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and state agencies that work with repatriated victims of trafficking should also address the multiple difficulties women face when they attempt to reintegrate.

The various factors that contribute to trafficking are sometimes categorized as "supply side" factors, such as the feminization of poverty, and "demand side" factors, such as weak border controls in destination countries. Frequently, it is a combination of these factors that pushes women and girls into situations in which they are exploited and become victims of trafficking. Effective strategies to eliminate trafficking necessarily involve addressing multiple contributing factors. Trafficking in women persists, in part, due to the fact that many national governments neither control nor prevent the problem. Government policies and practices may actually facilitate trafficking. Within the broad category of prevention, government bodies and non-governmental organizations should take both a short-term and long-term approach to addressing trafficking. Short-term actions include education and awareness-raising initiatives. Medium and longer-term projects include lobbying efforts to change national laws, training and technical cooperation projects for law enforcement and the judiciary and improving the social and economic position of women.

Trafficking in persons and related crimes have relatively recently become the issues of concern for Belarus. To address them, the Government of Belarus has been pursuing a range of activities in four major fields:

1. streamlining national legislation;
2. creating special police units for combating trafficking in persons;
3. launching an awareness campaign for women seeking employment abroad;
4. promoting social service institutions capable of rendering assistance to potential and actual victims of trafficking in persons.

The Government of Belarus combats human trafficking within the existing legal framework with adherence to national legislation, norms and principles of international law, standards in human rights protection, and provisions of universal and regional international agreements to which Belarus has acceded.

Legal basis of struggle against trafficking in persons consists of the following instruments: Constitution of the Republic of Belarus; Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus; Procedural Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus; Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus; National Program of Comprehensive Measures towards Combating Trade in Human Beings and Spread-

ing of Prostitution for 2002 – 2007 approved by the Council of Ministers of Belarus.

In order to effectively fight the proliferation of human trafficking and prostitution the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus in concert with other national bodies and non-governmental organizations working in this area elaborated the National Program of Comprehensive Measures towards Combating Trade in Human Beings and the Spreading of Prostitution for 2002 – 2007. The primary goal of preventive measures under the Program is to increase Belarusian people's awareness of trade in human beings and prostitution, including through information campaigns in printed and electronic mass media outlets. The Program contains a set of measures of social, legal, healthcare and organizational character aimed at bringing together the efforts of national bodies and, in such a way, at increasing the efficiency of their work to combat human trafficking and spread of prostitution. Most important legal-organizational actions of the Program include:

- elaboration of conceptual provisions defining the victim status of crimes connected with trade in human beings;
- introduction of improvements in the active legislation;
- study and summarization of investigative and court practices in cases related to trade in human beings;
- study of practice and mechanisms of provision at the expense of employer life and health insurance for those hired to work abroad;
- introduction of licensing for international intermediary marriage activity;
- organization of seminars to study and exchange the experience of combating human trafficking and prostitution.

In keeping with its international commitments to combat illicit human trafficking, Belarus has completed the necessary procedures for acceding to the International Convention on Combating Trade in Women and Children, the Convention on Civil Aspects of International Abduction of Children and a series of other relevant multilateral legal instruments. At present, the Belarusian Government carries out procedural activities to become a party to the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its addenda – the Protocol against unlawful importation of migrants by land, sea and air, and the Protocol on prevention and suppression of trade in persons, especially women and children, and punishment for it.

Cooperation between Belarusian and foreign law-enforcement agencies in addressing trade in persons is based on bilateral agreements on cooperation in combating crime. In the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States Belarus has joined a set of multilateral agreements to fight organized

crime including in trafficking in persons. The Government of the Republic of Belarus faces several major problems that have become obstacles in increasing the efficiency of law enforcement agencies' activities in combating the crimes of trafficking in persons, including, among others:

- absence of common interagency information system containing data on natural and juridical persons who were taken note of as connected to trafficking in women for sexual exploitation;
- lack of resources to provide opportunities for law enforcement officers dealing with trafficking in persons to enhance professional level and receive special training. So far their qualification is increased only at seminars with participation of foreign experts;
- absence of material and technical basis corresponding to modern requirements of law enforcement agencies to keep track and document activities of international crime groups.

As a result of measures undertaken by law-enforcement authorities of the Government of Belarus the number of exposed crimes connected to trade in human beings such as brothel keeping, prostitution and pimping has risen by more than 5 times over the last six years. Whereas only 42 crimes involving abuse of morality were registered in 1996, their number reached 62 in 1997, 89 – in 1999, 149 – in 2000, and 197 – in 2001. The number of disclosed crimes rose significantly in 2002 and reached 443. In 2002, 44 people were convicted and sentenced to different punishment for crimes connected with trade in persons, including imprisonment for 19 of them.

But while these are important breakthroughs -- unfortunately reality calls for much more. International treaties and mechanisms are only useful if they are carried back into a country and respected. Human rights are only real if they provide real equality and equal protection.

Violence against women may be universal but it is not inevitable. We can end it. But for that we must be ready to listen to the voices of women and support them to organize themselves. We must be willing to challenge religious, social and cultural attitudes that belittle women. We must be ready to fight for the equal access of women to political power and economic resources. We must have the courage to confront those in authority and demand change. But most importantly, we can end it if we are ready to change ourselves.