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At the International UNICEF Symposium on Child Trafficking



Tokyo - 21 May 2004

It is fitting that Japan continues to bring attention to the issue of child trafficking. The leadership that Japan demonstrated in hosting the **2nd World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation in 2001** gave renewed life to a campaign to end what is one of the most obscene and repulsive forms of child abuse that the world has ever known. That the Government of Japan, in co-operation with UNICEF, continued that leadership in hosting last year another Symposium on the Trafficking of children, is indicative both of its continued commitment to the addressing the issue, and as importantly, a recognition of just how difficult it is to understand the extent and the nature of this problem, and how slow the world is in creating the environment necessary to address it.

Trafficking is by definition a clandestine, undercover activity, and therefore one on which it is difficult to get accurate information and figures. Many countries lack specific legislation on trafficking, and victims, most often outside their own home countries, are frightened to report their experiences. And it is a complicated phenomenon, often comprising a complex series of events for the individuals involved.

A young 15 year old girl currently housed in a Shelter for trafficked girls in Romania, tells how she was initially pushed into prostitution in Romania, after she had run away from home because of fighting between her parents. Then, she recounts, when she was 14, she got her Identification papers, and a passport and was sent by her “lady master” to Turkey. Arrested and sent back home, the same “lady master” was waiting and shortly afterwards she was sent abroad again this time to Spain. All in all, forced into prostitution in three countries by the time she was 15 years old.

Now home in Romania, her telling comment is

“What I went through every day was difficult for a child”

Globally there is little accurate data on the numbers of women and children involved. Estimates vary between 700,000 and 1.2 million, **each year**. 97 countries have reported cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children, and nearly 10 years ago a report of the Secretary General suggested that some 1 million children enter the sex trade each year.

In Central and Eastern Europe what we **do** know is that

- the majority of women working in the sex industry in the Balkan Countries are victims of trafficking,
- an estimated 10-15% of those are adolescent girls,
- not all trafficking is sexually related, younger children in particular are often trafficked for labour and begging
- There has been a decrease in the number of victims of trafficking who have been identified and assisted. This decrease, according to the police is primarily caused by women refusing assistance when identified, or refusing assistance to return home. Thus while some observers will suggest that this is evidence to show that trafficking is decreasing, the case is not a strong one and indeed, it may well be that increased professionalism of the traffickers keeps them one step ahead of law enforcement agencies.

Global trafficking is in the words of a UNICEF report, ***“is increasingly controlled by sophisticated criminal gangs, who recruit children, forge passports for them and smuggle them to Europe”***

While figures are unclear and debate exists about the numbers involved, in the course of the last 12- 18 months, the numbers of reports on trafficking have increased and the distinction between countries of origin, countries of transit and countries of receipt is even more blurred now than it was a number of years ago.

Poverty is still a driving force, and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent states have suffered extraordinary poverty since the collapse of communism in all its forms 15 or so years ago.

Of the 27 countries in this region in which UNICEF works, only in the last two years have we seen a return to positive economic growth, and still the gross national income of these countries is still less than it was in 1988 and 1989. 8 of the 77 low income countries in the world are countries that were part of the Soviet Union.

15 years ago a poor person in one of these countries had an income that was one third of that of the richest. Today a poor person in the region now has an income of one tenth of that of a rich person.

Poverty is more pervasive, and disparities are greater. Poverty pushes people to desperation.

In Northern Europe, there is a clear pattern of trafficking between the poorer Baltic States and the affluent cities of Scandinavia, reflecting historical as well as geographical links,

following sea trade and exchange routes and traditional patterns of movement. Children are trafficked into begging, street hawking, unskilled labour and commercial sex. Trafficking through and out of the countries of Central Asia and central and Eastern Europe] is characterized by the push of dysfunctional societies in the wake of economic depression and societal dislocation, and the involvement of small-scale crime. Children and especially adolescents are trafficked into service industries and the entertainment sector, for the sex trade and for pornography and as mail-order brides.

So it should not be a surprise when we learn that 5 years ago, 85% of all sex workers in Soho, London were nationals of the United Kingdom, but that now 85% are foreigners, and most of those are from Eastern Europe.

And it should not be a surprise that 1 in every three victims of trafficking from Albania are thought to be girls under 18.

And it should not surprise us that virtually every country in Central and Eastern Europe and within the EU has an element of the problem to deal with. All are countries of origin and/or transit and/or receipt.

While the world may strive to reduce and eliminate poverty by 2015, even achieving that goal is of little value for today's trafficked children. Actions are needed today for today's victims.

And slowly but surely action is taking place.

More and more countries have signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. I am pleased that the Japanese Parliament is discussing this in its current session, and will, we hope, ratify this optional protocol, together with the Optional Protocol on Children in war within two months. The ratification globally of these protocols is a necessary condition to push forward with action to address this problem.

Necessary but not enough.

In a statement of commitment to victim/witness protection, coinciding with the entry into law last December of the UN Palermo Protocol, the countries associated with the Stability Pact for South East Europe agreed to

Assist and protect the victims of trafficking,

Adopt minimum standards for the treatment of child victims of trafficking based upon the guidelines developed by UNICEF,

Systematically collect data on child trafficking.

And it is an issue that has engaged many UNICEF offices in different parts of the world. In Central and Eastern Europe we have developed Guidelines on the Protection of the Rights of children Victims of Trafficking in South Eastern Europe, now adopted by all governments.

In Albania we work on the repatriation of Albanian children trafficked to Greece and Italy, carrying out street investigations in Athens and Rome, and working with local communities to protect children from trafficking, and on reintegration programmes for those who come home.

Our national committees in Japan, Germany, Italy and UK, and in 10 other countries, have all made trafficking a priority in their work this year. Fund raising campaigns have raised monies for work in Cambodia, Benin, Albania, and many other countries where this is an issue.

The UNICEF Committee here in Japan, has taken very strong leadership in running a campaign to stop child trafficking, and in lobbying Parliamentarians on the issue. Today symposium is another step in this direction.

The UK committee has done the same, and assisted the UK parliament in reviewing sexual offences law and helped develop changes to legislation that will further protect victims of trafficking.

Most significantly for countries of Central Eastern Europe and European Union, the Council of Europe is leading the preparation of a European Convention on Action against trafficking in human beings. This convention will be a legally binding document on the member states of the Council, and while many of its provisions are ones that can be found in legislative frameworks elsewhere, the most characteristic of this convention is that it frames the issue of trafficking as a violation of human rights.

We in UNICEF agree, trafficking is a major failure to protect the rights of children.

While repression of trafficking clearly needs to be pursued and enhanced, from a children's rights standpoint it is equally vital that simultaneous emphasis be placed both on the prevention of circumstances that spawn trafficking and on the protection of victims.

How we view the problem helps determine how we will solve it.

Trafficking is not just an issue of illegal migration, though it clearly has elements of illegal migration included.

Trafficking is equally not just an issue of law enforcement, though clearly in many countries where prostitution is illegal, law enforcement does play a part.

Trafficking is fundamentally an issue of human rights, for us an issue of child rights.

Children have the right not to be treated as criminals or offenders but must be recognised as victims and to be provided with psychosocial, material or other practical and logistical support in the country where they are found and, where applicable, on return to their country of origin. Jailing the young exploited victim does nothing to solve problem and simply sending a child back into the arms of those who perpetrate the problem in the first place is not an answer. We can and must do better than this.

Thank you.