



Media Release

International agencies forge common front against human trafficking

PRETORIA (3 September 2007) – As South Africa’s human trafficking week gets underway, four international agencies responsible for the Southern African region have announced that they intend to forge a common front to combat this modern day form of slavery.

The four organisations are the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef).

Some of these organisations work mainly on cross-border trafficking while others are equally concerned with the more extensive trafficking that occurs within individual countries. The two forms of human trafficking constitute the world’s third largest illegal trade, after arms and drug trafficking.

“Human trafficking is rightly referred to as the slavery of the modern world and like the slavery of old it is a highly organised enterprise that crosses national borders,” said Dr Jonathan Lucas, Regional Representative of the UNODC Regional Office for Southern Africa

“To fight it effectively we need to raise our level of organisation and work much more closely with blocs of countries.”

The UNODC is tasked with assisting states to ratify and implement provisions of the international Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish the Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. The protocol has been ratified by 114 countries, including most Southern African states, but trafficking persists across the globe.

In March this year, the United Nations launched the Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT). The Steering Committee for this initiative involves a number of UN agencies at global level, including the four that are joining forces in Southern Africa.

The Southern African cooperation initiative on trafficking is a first-of-a-kind regional development that builds on the UN.GIFT approach.

“We are aiming to give effect to the spirit of UN.GIFT at a regional level. At the heart of the issue is closer collaboration and teamwork – not only among international agencies but also among governments and non-governmental organisations,” said Ms Judica Amri-Makhetha, Director of the ILO Pretoria office. “If we as international agencies can forge closer working relationships, we believe it will assist the countries that we support to align their efforts to combat trafficking.”

The organisations asserted that two factors, in particular, are critical to combating human trafficking: Dedicated legislation on trafficking within every country and effective working agreements between countries.

They applauded the progress made by Mozambique and South Africa in developing legislation against child trafficking but urged these countries to move with speed to put such laws into effect.

Unicef points out that an estimated 10 000 to 15 000 girls aged 12-18 years are involved in sex tourism in Kenya and about 3 000 children are sexually exploited in the tourism areas of south-west Madagascar.

“In many countries the absence of a specific law on child trafficking is a serious loophole that undermines the global effort to stop child trafficking,” said Per Engebak, Unicef Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa. “Existing laws that address certain aspects of trafficking, such as kidnapping, rape or sexual exploitation, fall short of punishing perpetrators for the crime of trafficking itself.”

Close cooperation between international agencies dealing with trafficking will enhance information sharing, strengthen the pool of expertise and enable the agencies to provide better support to the Southern African region as a whole. It will create the capacity to operate as a resource to the Southern African

Development Community (SADC), thereby enhancing the prospect of cross-border working agreements between countries.

Each of the four agencies deals with different aspects of trafficking:

- The UNODC, as mentioned above, has overall responsibility for implementation of the Protocol against Trafficking in Persons.
- The ILO is specifically tasked with combating trafficking for purposes of labour exploitation, which constitutes one of the worst forms of child labour and amount to forced labour.
- Unicef's mandate is to support implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes the protection of children from exploitation and abuse, including trafficking.
- IOM promotes the positive management of migration and the protection of the rights of migrants globally, and works closely with the UN system through global agreement on various issues.

"IOM published research in 2003 that revealed that South Africa is a country of destination, transfer and origin of trafficking victims," said HP Boe, Regional Representative for IOM.

"Since then, notable progress has been made in addressing human trafficking in the region. However, much remains to be done and IOM will continue to assist governments and civil society in developing measures to deal with the problem. Our awareness campaigns, advocacy and training programmes have created a solid foundation on which we all can build."

Human Trafficking Week, 2 – 8 September, is an annual event initiated by the company, Diasporafic, in partnership with IOM, in order to increase awareness of trafficking. The theme for the week is *Blow the Whistle*, chosen to highlight the link between the 2010 World Cup and the risk of increased human trafficking.

Released by the Southern African regional offices of the UNODC, ILO, IOM and Unicef.

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Useful websites:

UNODC:	www.unodc.org.za
ILO/ TECL:	www.child-labour.org.za
IOM:	www.iom.org.za
UNICEF:	www.unicef.org