

REPORT

Panel Discussion: A Crime So Monstrous – Trafficking in Human Beings

April 23rd, 2010 – 14:00-15:30

Amerika Haus – Friedrich-Schmidt-Platz 2, 1010 Vienna

IOM Vienna and the U.S. Embassy Vienna jointly organized the panel discussion based on journalist **E. Benjamin Skinner's** book, titled “A Crime So Monstrous – Face to face with Modern-Day-Slavery” which describes human trafficking cases on four continents. The personal stories related in the book are heartbreaking but in the midst of tragedy Mr. Skinner also discovered a quiet dignity that leads some to resist and aspire to freedom. He bears witness for them and for the millions that are held in the shadows – all victims of what is the greatest human-rights challenge facing our generation.

The following **panellists** held speeches on the current situation of human trafficking, national strategies for combating this phenomenon, new features and new challenges, as well as innovative methods for reducing the incidence of trafficking: Mr. E. Benjamin Skinner, Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger, National Coordinator on Trafficking in Human Beings from the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs) Ms. Maria-Grazia Giammarinaro, OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, and Mr. Andreas Halbach, Head of Special Liaison Mission, International Organization for Migration in Vienna.

Cultural Attaché Ms. Meg White from the U.S. Embassy opened the Panel Discussion by showing a short UN.GIFT film titled [“Open Your Eyes to Human Trafficking”](#). She proceeded by welcoming the participants and the audience and introducing Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Skinner began his speech by defining human trafficking as modern-day slavery, as the recruitment, transportation and/or harbouring of slaves. Slaves, as the International Labour Organization states, are those forced to work, held under fraud through the threat of violence for no pay beyond subsistence.

He continued with telling a short story about a young woman he had met in a hospice in South Africa during his travels. At the time of encounter she told him that she had been sold into a Nigerian trafficking syndicate a year and a half earlier. She had been kicked out of a brothel in which she had not been allowed to refuse certain customers, even those who had refused to use protection. Now she was left with suffering from tuberculosis, three months pregnant and HIV positive. At the end of the conversation he asked her if there was one message she would like to pass on to 3-4 million Times Magazine readers, what would it be? She responded that she could not think in such dimensions but that she would specifically like to thank him for listening to her, as he was the first person who had ever listened to her story. Sadly, he was also the last person to have ever heard the story, as she died a week later.

Mr. Skinner emphasized that we cannot lose sight of the reality and the **number of victims of human trafficking**, particularly as we are all relying on estimates. However, he reported that the vast majority of cases of slavery have been identified in Southern Asia. They are often held in what the UN terms “collateralized generational debt bondage”. That is to say that these people are in theory working to pay off a debt that either they or their forbearers had taken on. This practice is in many countries, like India or Pakistan, illegal. However, these laws have unfortunately never been enforced. And so you get for example, as Mr. Skinner found, in a quarry in northern India, a man who he named “Ganu” (to protect his identity), who’s work – like the rest of the villagers – required removing huge rocks from the earth. The children were employed to go into the quarry and use explosives to blast up the rocks from the earth which they then pounded into gravel which was consequently used as material for many of India’s infrastructure projects, such as roads. They then further pulverized it into sand which is used as an essential element in the manufacture of glass. This example of handmade sand illustrates **modern-day slavery**. Nobody in the village was paid in cash. At various points the master, when he deemed it necessary in order to continue their labour, would cover a ceremonial expense or a health cost but that was entirely at his discretion. And the debt that was originally incurred that compelled this particular individual, Ganu, to work, was not a debt that he had directly taken, it had been passed on from his grandfather. The debt was the equivalent of 62 cents. Yet, two slave generations later he was still forced to work under threat of violence, for no pay beyond subsistence. At one point Mr. Skinner had asked him why he had ever run away and he responded “Where would I go, how would I eat? My master would surely find me and beat me or kill me, as has been the case with others.” So slavery had become his world.

In closing, Mr. Skinner concluded that the **cycles of dependence** must be changed and that slavery could be abolished in a generation. Denying the role of underdevelopment and poverty is like denying the law of gravity. The end of slavery cannot wait for the end of poverty. All of us, particularly in the developed world, would have to reach out and contribute our part and target the communities that are already being targeted by traffickers. We must address the social isolation, the lack of rights and the underlying poverty in those communities.

Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger also opened her statement with two Austria-related trafficking stories. The first story dealt with a girl who was found by the Austrian police while she was being **forced to work** at a Chinese restaurant. The police took her to a specialized service provider on child trafficking cases about four years ago. Yet still today it is not known by the Austrian authorities who she is because she had probably never been registered back in China. She is now living in Austria without a passport. But what saves her is that she is a genius, an excellent pianist. Yet her greatest difficulty today is to prove that she needs a passport.

The second story was about a believed to be **adopted girl** from Ethiopia by a well to do Austrian family. At the age of five she was adopted alongside what was told to her to be her younger brother. It turned out that they were neither related, nor that their set of parents had passed away. A corrupt lawyer in Ethiopia had taken these children away from their parents telling them that they would be sent abroad for a nice holiday and had cashed a lot of money in the process.

She went on to explain that in Austria there are various forms of exploitation, such as forced labour, which comes in variations. For example there are children who are forced to engage in petty crimes such as stealing, there is illegal adoption, the trade of human organs, but in the vast majority of Austrian cases we are talking about varying types of forced prostitution. This depicts a very Hobbesian world, very different from the one we usually see on the surface on a daily basis.

Ambassador Tichy-Fisslberger continued that we merely have **estimates of the true scale of this world-wide phenomenon**. The estimate is that there is slavery in 126 countries, that there are 27 million slaves world-wide, 40 per cent of whom are believed to be children, and there are about 1.24 million new victims of human trafficking worldwide, every year. The profits generated from human trafficking are estimated at 32 billion dollars per year. Human trafficking is expected to be at least as lucrative as the drug dealing business, but it is less risky for the perpetrators. With these facts you no longer believe the assertion that slavery has been abolished. You stop believing that parents always take good care of their children and you start believing that human beings have a price. According to police the price for example of a beautiful girl to be traded into **forced prostitution** can reach up to 70.000 Euros. UNODC estimate that human trafficking is the most difficult branch of their work at the moment and EUROPOL has recently been saying that human trafficking sees the highest revenue generated out of all the crimes. Yet we are only able to spot a fraction of the true dimensions of this crime. We are only familiar with the tip of the iceberg, particularly because victims are often too afraid to go to the police as they are frequently told in cases of illegal residence that the police would only send them home. The perpetrators know exactly how to blackmail the victims and often threaten to endanger the victim's family if they do not comply.

Ambassador Tichy-Fisslberger turned to discussing the varied reasons and explanations of human trafficking. One of the main reasons, she explained, was the breakdown of the Communist world. After the fall of the Iron Curtain all kinds of criminal networks and cycles of corruption evolved. These cycles are very difficult to break. In Austria many victims of human trafficking, though not exclusively, come from former Soviet countries and Eastern Europe. Austria is a country of both transit and destination of human trafficking. Explaining human trafficking is complex but it has a lot to do with the conflicts and fears that arise as a result of living in a globalised, unpredictable world. Yet it is also because people are treated as a commodity as one further form of consumerism.

To conclude, she expressed **how human trafficking can be combated**. She said that there is no lack of legal instruments, neither at the national nor at the European or international level but the challenge lies in the implementation of such legislation. Sadly, only an estimated 5-10 percent of all cases come to the attention of the authorities and only 1 percent of victims are believed to be rescued. In Austria the **problem is multidimensional**. Therefore it is being addressed in a multidimensional way. In 2004 the government established what was called a Task Force against Human Trafficking. It comprises 10 Ministries, the *Bundesländer*, as well as specific NGOs. There is the attempt to address the problem in a multi-pronged way, every Ministry and *Bundesland* doing their bit, working, for example on a second National Action Plan. Yet the work being done is not sufficient and of course there is room for improvement. Ambassador Tichy-Fisslberger emphasized that events like this panel discussion are vital for **raising awareness among** the Austrian population and that you should not be embarrassed if you suspect a case of human trafficking and you do not know what to do. There is a **hotline** managed by the Criminal Intelligence Service in Austria (01 24836 85383) which runs 24hours and can be used in case of a suspicion.

Ms. Maria-Grazia Giammarinaro began by mentioning the “distance” to the problem of human trafficking that is often felt when talking about it. She therefore thanked Mr. Skinner for making the issue more real for most people by telling the world-wide stories through his book. This is an essential element of **awareness-raising**. It is important to know how to tell a story and balance being respectful towards the victims and the monstrosities that they endured. We must show strength and realize that while some victims are constantly active in searching for a better life, for many, slavery is the only world they know and will ever know.

Ms. Maria-Grazia Giammarinaro pointed out that the work that has been done to fight human trafficking must not be underestimated. However, one crucial possibility that trafficked persons must be offered is a **residence permit for work in destination countries**, an alternative that is not yet the case in many countries. It is vital that we take the point of view of the victim. Her approach to anti-trafficking action, she explained, is deeply rooted in human rights, which means that **the rights and legitimate interests of trafficked persons must always take first place**. She further added that she is also determined to build upon the **cross-dimensional nature of her mandate**, to foster cooperation with actors in other areas such as organised crime corruption and money laundering.

To conclude, she stated that it is important to promote a change in the perception of trafficking, because it is still considered something marginal. In fact, it is a huge phenomenon, not only involving sexual exploitation but also forced labour and domestic servitude. Finally, **human trafficking** does not only take place somewhere far away, it **is taking place everywhere**. It can happen anywhere and therefore it is important to realize that it is everyone's business to know about it an attempt to prevent it from happening.

Mr. Andreas Halbach stated the importance of prevention methods in fighting human trafficking. Prevention is crucial because it is what happens before the damage is done “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”. He declared that based on IOM's experience, prevention involves, among others, **five main strategies**: 1) Awareness-raising among stakeholders, vulnerable groups and the population at large, 2) Assisting and protecting the victims to avoid re-trafficking, 3) prosecution and criminalization of the traffickers and criminals involved, 4) addressing developmental root causes of human trafficking and migration, and 5) reducing demand in countries of origin for products of trafficking.

In Central Asia in countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as in Eastern European countries such as Moldova and the Ukraine, IOM has been carrying out, many **awareness-raising projects** such as distributing information materials, preparing public service announcements and conducting educational activities to improve knowledge of the problem. Nevertheless, every country is unique and therefore prevention work must often be tailored to the country's individual situation. Regarding prosecution, IOM's technical cooperation activities build on the **capacity of both government and civil society organizations**. They include the training of non-governmental organizations and government officials, such as police, as well as technical support in the development of counter-trafficking legislation, policies and procedures.

However, prevention needs to go deeper and beyond criminalization in order to **tackle the root causes of human trafficking**. Root causes in countries of origin sometimes include war, natural disasters, but mostly result from poverty, lack of development and lack of opportunities. Additionally, because few opportunities for regular migration exist, many individuals are forced into **irregular migration channels**, which often entail smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons. Migration has to become a genuine choice rather than a necessity; an alternative rather than a last resort. It has to become an opportunity not only for those wanting to migrate, but also for the societies that need to stem demographic decline and economic stagnation. This in turn calls for enhancing legal channels for migration in order to protect the rights of migrants.

In countries of origin relatively large investments have been made in order to reduce trafficking but very little has been done to reduce the demand in developed countries, such as demand for cheap goods, cheap labour, and cheap services, which fuel the cycles of exploitation. Consumers tend to have a keen sense of the cost of products but they tend not to worry too much about the production. In order to address the consumer, IOM launched a campaign in October 2009, titled

[“Buy Responsibly”](#), which urges consumers, particularly in developed countries, to consider more critically whether the production of goods and services could involve trafficked persons.

Finally, Mr. Halbach remarked, if we take a look at the issue through the perspective of an emerging global labour market as a consequence of increased general mobility then we need to think about how to manage demand and supply in an orderly fashion, how to promote good practices and principles, how to regulate the recruitment agencies and how to protect the rights of labour migrants and their families.

Mr. Halbach concluded by pointing out that the world population is predicted to grow by up to another 50 percent and reach an estimated 9 billion by the middle of the century. This growth will occur mainly in developing countries, while most developed countries will experience demographic ageing and decline. Therefore, the pulls and pushes of migration will become much more dynamic and from that it's not difficult to deduce that trafficking is a definite growth industry.

Questions, Comments and Discussion

The first audience member to raise her voice was a representative of UNODC, who emphasized how important it is to talk about real persons and real victims of the crime, and that we should do everything we can to empower these and potential victims.

The second audience member was the Sudanese Ambassador in Vienna who asked Mr. Skinner what exactly he meant when he said that slavery could be abolished within a generation.

Mr. Skinner responded that in order to eradicate human trafficking it is first necessary to define the problem in terms of “slavery” rather than, for example, “abduction”. We must tackle the root causes. That is, working with entire communities, not only individuals, to make sure that they are not socially isolated, to make sure that they are aware of their rights, and to make sure they have access to basic fundamental public health care, to education, and to credit.

The next audience member, a researcher from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, commented that concerning the EU laws there is room for improvement. Firstly, the definition of trafficking does not include illegal adoption, this should be changed. Secondly, foreign victims of human trafficking should always be granted unconditional residence. He then praised the Czech Republic where children who have been victims of trafficking are granted an education and they are given the right of residence until they reach maturity. At that point, if they are doing well in their education, they are given the possibility of a more permanent residence status.

The following audience member, a student, asked Mr. Skinner why he thought that sexual exploitation is at the forefront of the debate. She then proceeded to ask him whether he thought one form of trafficking was more of a criminal nature than another.

Mr. Skinner responded that he thought that it is because the majority of cases are cases of sexual exploitation that this side of human trafficking is the most actively debated. He added that in his opinion no form of exploitation is better than others. Of course there are degrees of exploitation, but in principle it is simply the greatest form of human rights violation.

The final audience comment from Mary Kreutzer, author of the book “Ware Frau”, dealt with the issue of asylum. The Austrian law does not allow asylum seekers to work. However, there is an exception, namely sex work. She also mentioned the lack of funding to support the good work that many Austrian NGOs do.

Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger responded that there is a problem with the lack of implementation of laws. However, laws do not solve the problem. The crunch of the matter is the difficulty of identifying victims. Once they have been identified in Austria there is good care available, but identifying them in the first place is a major problem. The problem is that worldwide 1 in 7 persons is a migrant, three quarters of them are internal migrants, more than 200.000 are external migrants, and this is what makes the work of legislators in Europe so difficult. She said that she is not trying to defend them but she is trying to explain the global dimension of the problem.

Finally, Mr. Skinner highlighted Mr. Halbach's point about addressing consumer demands, stating that this aspect of modern-day slavery is one in which all of us are implicit in if we do not question the products we buy. The market will reward transparency, but only if its consumers stand up and advocate for what is important.

Link to the ORF article on the panel discussion: <http://oe1.orf.at/artikel/243165>