



BELARUS

Check against delivery

**United Nations
General Assembly thematic debate on human trafficking**

**Panel discussion: Protecting victims of trafficking and
cross-border cooperation in prosecuting traffickers in persons**

3 June 2008

STATEMENT

by

Her Excellency Natalya Petkevich
Deputy Head of Administration
of the President of the Republic of Belarus

Indifference may be one of the worst human qualities. Indifference of an individual is terrifying. But indifference of peoples and countries inevitably leads to a global disaster.

The same way we, the whole international community, used to shut our eyes to the fact that in the 20th and the 21st centuries, as well as hundreds of years ago, a human being becomes an item to be offered for and put on sale.

If we consider this fact thoroughly, the absurdity of the situation is beyond our comprehension: human trafficking is a matter of business in the modern civilization, which conquered nature and outer space. Moreover it is one of the highly profitable businesses.

This is why it is very important that we begin to speak out openly of human trafficking problem and develop counter measures. It is even more vital that this issue is being discussed at the highest rostrum – the rostrum of the United Nations.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the states that in cooperation with Belarus initiated today's debates, and to the President of the United Nations General Assembly who supported this idea.

For a number of years Belarus has been promoting the initiatives aimed at combating trafficking in persons and elimination of all forms of modern slavery.

The experience of Belarus in this sphere has been acknowledged as worthy of consideration.

As an example I would like to mention that that we achieved significant progress in bringing this crime out of latent categories. Last year we suppressed 103 channels of trafficking of Belarusian citizens into 13 countries, revealed 441 criminal offences connected with human trafficking and identified 418 victims of trafficking. Only during this year in close cooperation with foreign law-enforcement agencies we suppressed the activity of 3 international criminal organizations.

Therefore not by a mere chance the International Center for training, upgrading qualifications and retraining of personnel dealing with migration and counteracting human trafficking has been founded in our country as primary educational institution in this sphere for the CIS countries.

Fortunately trafficking in persons has not gained a menacing scale in Belarus. However we understand that this phenomenon is a **perilous social virus** which will be spreading all over the world unless a reliable antidote is developed.

Much has been done in this direction already. A number of documents have been adopted by international forum, special commissions and task forces are effectively functioning.

Nevertheless, let us be sincere. A steady growth of the number of victims testifies to a deficient effectiveness of efforts undertaken to combat trafficking in persons.

Why do the criminals become more resourceful whereas law-enforcement agencies prove to be incapable of an adequate counteraction? There are several interrelated reasons.

Firstly. It is impossible to cope with this evil alone, in a single country. **The problem has become of a global nature.** Efforts of the whole international community are needed in order to overcome it.

Secondly. Human trafficking is an evil with deep and extensive roots. On the one hand, it is necessary to resist challenges that incite people to fall into the hands of slave-traders, namely, poverty, inequality, and lack of education. On the other hand, it is essential to eliminate factors that create demand for victims of human trafficking: corruption, impunity of consumers of services provided by the victims of human trafficking and others.

That is why counteractive policies must **take into account the specific features** of different forms of trafficking in persons as well as the peculiarities of its victims.

On the assumption of the aforesaid, arises the **third reason.** Progress can be achieved only by means of an approach to the resolving of the problem

of human trafficking which presupposes **the involvement of all partners** including states, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, businesses and mass media into the fight against this evil.

The **Interagency Coordination Group** created in accordance with the decision of the General Assembly in 2006 and the **UN Global Initiative on Combating Trafficking in Persons** partially contribute to the problem solving.

However these mechanisms cannot significantly change the situation without a broad political support and the involvement of all Member States into this process.

Precisely this was the reason for the Republic of Belarus to launch in 2006 **an initiative** to elaborate **a strategy of the United Nations for combating human trafficking**.

Neither the name nor the form of this document makes the essence. The point is to create an adjusted, comprehensive and coordinated mechanism allowing not just effectively combat but substantially resist trafficking in persons.

I want to express special gratitude to the European Union for the meaningful considerations regarding our proposal of strategy elaboration.

We believe that it is necessary to **continue an open discussion** involving countries, international organisations, all participants of the process of combating of trafficking in persons in order to adopt this strategy **at a special session of the United Nations General Assembly on Human Trafficking** within next few years.

I hope that the participants of today's discussion will suggest their opinions regarding this initiative.

Our forum is dedicated to the problems of protection of human trafficking victims and punishment of human traders. It is like two sides of the same coin.

I think everybody agrees with my opinion that regardless of the reason by which a person becomes a victim of human trafficking, whether due to his own irresponsible behavior or being forced into it, **the state must protect a person and render necessary assistance**. There are several hundreds of social centres in Belarus designated for that purpose.

156 territorial social centres are functioning in Belarus. 143 social and pedagogical centres and social delinquency shelters are providing rehabilitation for minors. There are 10 foster houses within the system of the

Ministry of health for the rehabilitation of children up to three years old (although no cases of trafficking in children of this age have been revealed). 4 specialized rehabilitation centres for victims of violence and human trafficking have been opened.

15 NGOs provide assistance in reintegration for such victims.

At the same time we need to do everything **to assure the inevitability of prosecution of the criminals**. In other words it is important not only to suppress unlawful activity but also institute criminal proceedings against offenders. Regrettably, the first does not necessarily result from the second.

In order to assure it we need to refine constantly legislative base and improve professionalism of law-enforcement agencies. The state must not “beat at the tails” but “trap” the criminals beforehand.

Let me give an example. According to the statistical information the volume of child pornography in Internet increased twenty-fold in the last decade while the total amount of web-sites offering this kind of product exceeds one hundred thousand. In this regard in May 2008 the President of the Republic of Belarus introduced into the Parliament the draft legislation on aggravation of responsibility for committing crimes related to production and distribution of child pornography. The draft contemplates the maximum punishment of up to 13 years of imprisonment for this category of crime provided aggravating circumstances.

Vision and content of particular actions may differ. It is evident however that urgent measures are to be called for. We can not brush off this “uncomfortable truth” and underestimate the necessity of decisive and well coordinated actions to combat this evil.

The international community has no right for that since it bears responsibility for the future of the world, future of our children. And it is the task of today’s generation to do its best to make it a happy future.