



# BELARUS

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**UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
'TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN AND GIRLS:  
MEETING THE CHALLENGE TOGETHER'**

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**STATEMENT  
BY H.E. VLADIMIR NAUMOV  
MINISTER OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS**

The importance of combating trafficking in persons in the contemporary world is beyond any doubt. The international community cannot help but admit the fact that in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century this practically forgotten vice of the past comes to life again and becomes a socially threatening force.

Along with the international community the Republic of Belarus found itself subdued by the international criminal network of trafficking in “human commodity”.

The scale of this problem results from its international nature, latency and profitability for criminal communities. According to the statistics of international organisations, trafficking in persons ranks globally as a third most profitable criminal activity after arms and drugs trafficking. Each year hundreds of thousands of people become victims of slavery.

Combating the trafficking in persons is one of the priorities of the Republic of Belarus since this problem creates a threat to national security, undermines economy and stability of the society, violates basic human rights and freedoms. The need to take active efforts and the expediency of establishing a Global Partnership to fight trafficking in persons and the demand for “human commodity” was stressed by the President of the Republic of Belarus at the 2005 United Nations Summit in New York.

Ministry of Internal Affairs has been designated by the Head of State as the coordinator of activity of all state agencies combating trafficking in persons. More than 10 ministries and agencies are involved in this work. The situation is reported to the Head of State twice a year.

The measures undertaken allowed to increase the effectiveness of response to the contemporary threat of slave trade and provide the security of the population of our country. Since 2001 about one thousand crimes in the sphere of human trafficking and slave trade has been uncovered, 48 organised criminal groups and 10 international criminal organisations have been eliminated in Belarus. Criminal proceedings have been instituted against 1500 people, 2600 victims have been discovered.

Active work of law-enforcement agencies and more severe criminal legislation compel criminals to reshape their activity and find new forms of trafficking in “human commodity”. These forms have become more subtle, concealed and subject to conspiracy due to creation of model and marriage agencies, as well as under the guise of employment assistance abroad. Today this activity is under the strict control of relevant authorities and subject to licensing.

*For example, Ministry of Interior of Belarus eliminated an international criminal organisation which was involved in human trafficking. In order to conceal their activity the criminals created model agencies for recruitment of girls. From 2000 to 2005 the criminals sold abroad about 600 Belarusian girls. Minors were much in demand. The criminals recruited 115 of them. Now this case is in the court.*

The criminals have become more active by using marriage agencies, contracting pro forma marriages and processing documents for traveling abroad with the purpose to get acquainted and married. Escort services for the well-off have turned into a modern form of trafficking in persons.

Today the leaders of criminal groups prefer for the sake of their personal security to receive “human commodity” staying in a country of destination. They use the international system of bank transfers to pay the recruiters and cash in their criminal income.

The Republic of Belarus is a country of both origin and transit of “human commodity”. Our citizens have been trafficked to more than 30 countries for prostitution.

Nowadays a problem of forced labor has become more urgent for the Republic of Belarus. During 2005-2006 we discovered 350 victims of forced labor. Recruiters intentionally overstate the salaries, keep secret the real conditions of work and do not provide any social guarantees. Often people do not receive a salary and are unable to return home. Sometimes they even disappear.

The consequences of exploitation are usually irreversible. Daily sexual, physical and mental violence during many months or even years destroy a human personality and make a person disabled. Only professional and well-coordinated actions of law-enforcement bodies allow to avoid the tragic consequences.

*In 2004 the Ministry of Interior of Belarus requested the Turkish police to assist in the search for a disappeared Belarusian woman who became a victim of trafficking. The criminals got information about the efforts of law-enforcement bodies of Belarus and Turkey and decided to kill the girl. But due to the timely actions by the Turkish police they were detained.*

*In January 2005 this woman was repatriated to her homeland with the support of the Office of the International Organization for Migration in the Republic of Belarus and then she was sent to a rehabilitation center. Afterwards she started to cooperate with mass-media telling about her bitter experience in order to alert the public about the risk of becoming a victim of trafficking.*

The most abhorrent cases are those when people sell for profit their own relatives.

*I would like to give the participants an opportunity to watch a short video about a Belarusian girl who went abroad for a vacation but became a slave.*

As a result of timely actions by the Spanish police this girl and several other women were freed. Criminals were detained.

It is possible to defeat trafficking in persons only if actions of all interested states are well coordinated. To fight this crime effectively the Ministry of Interior maintains direct contacts with the law-enforcement agencies of Austria, Germany, Israel, Spain, Cyprus, Turkey and other states. As a result of such close cooperation we have succeeded in uncovering and terminating 10 international criminal groups.

I would like to give a couple of positive examples of cooperation with foreign colleagues.

*In February 2005 the members of an international criminal organization which trafficked people to Israel were detained simultaneously in Belarus and Israel. The path of trafficking in women from one country to another was followed for complete liquidation of the criminal group. As a result of joint special operation, 17 Belarusian girls were released, criminal proceedings were instituted against 2 Belarusians and 4 Israeli nationals.*

*This year in cooperation with the Lithuanian law-enforcement agencies we neutralized an international criminal organization, members of which trafficked "human commodity" from Minsk and Vitebsk regions of Belarus to Vilnius. During joint operation three Belarussian girls were released and 19 members of criminal*

*formation were detained. Eleven more criminals, including the owners of criminal business, are about to be detained.*

There is no doubt that international institutions and non-governmental organisations are making their positive contribution to the elimination of “modern slavery”. Belarus cooperates effectively with the International Organization for Migration, United Nations Development Programme and European Commission. With their participation our state has taken significant measures in rehabilitation of the victims of trafficking. Two joint projects of international technical assistance under the aegis of IMO and UNDP are to be started in 2007.

In order to minimise negative social consequences of trafficking in persons and to support its victims 4 rehabilitation centers are currently operating in Belarus. 156 regional centers of child and family care are currently functioning under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The Ministry of Education is running 82 social and educational centers for minors and 140 social shelters for children.

The offices of international organisations and non-governmental organisations also operate their own shelters for victims of trafficking. The total number of non-governmental and public organisations providing the rehabilitation assistance to the victims of trafficking in Belarus is 15.

In all regions of the country telephone “hot lines” are functioning to provide consultative assistance on the issue of safe travel abroad. Citizens are also welcome to seek consultation on the trafficking-related issues on-line on the website of the Ministry of Interior.

The High-Level International Conference on trafficking in person held in Minsk in October 2006 became a good example of positive international cooperation. Representatives of almost 40 states of the European Union, Commonwealth of Independent States and the Middle East as well as of 12 international and 8 non-governmental organisations took part in the conference. This event once again drew attention of the international community to the topic of combating against trafficking in persons. It also assisted in initiating a dialogue among the countries of origin and destination on possible joint actions.

It is important to mention that in the course of the conference the representatives of several states have initiated the establishment in Belarus of the International Training Center on Combating on Trafficking in Persons. This practical initiative is based on the understanding of the extensive experience gained by Belarus in combating of trafficking in persons as well as on the progressive legislation that has been developed. There are also other factors justifying this idea: favorable geographical and geopolitical location of Belarus (which is in the center of Europe

and has a border with the European Union), advanced transportation and urban infrastructure, sufficient training and material resources of the Academy of the Ministry of Interior.

We think that the following steps should be taken in order to further develop the mechanisms of international cooperation as well as their practical implementation:

1. The international convention stipulating unified approach for all states to defining the status of the victim of human trafficking, the mechanism of rehabilitation and return to the home country should be elaborated.
2. The international conventions on fighting trafficking in persons should be ratified by majority of states, which would allow to make accountable traffickers in the countries of destination.
3. Understanding the process of human trafficking in its entirety and complexity and taking urgent measures to curb the demand in “human commodity” in countries of destination in conjunction with the efforts of the countries of origin.

In the course of my professional activity I have to face personally the problems of human trafficking: to listen to the heart-breaking stories of victims of modern slavery, to see their eyes that have seen the hell, to analyze filthy and cunning tricks of the organisers of “human commodity” business.

Believe me that today’s slavery is one of the most terrible vices which does not have a human face. It has been developed by the most sophisticated criminals with well thought-out schemes of recruitment, fake of the documents, transportation, compulsion and exploitation. We must clearly understand whom we fight and whom we oppose. They are people who pay much attention to the young innocent victims and in order to wipe out their tracks consider a murder of the girls as a regular business method.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that combating slavery is a worldwide problem which even the most powerful state cannot solve alone. Only through united actions of the international community we might overcome this shameful vice and remnant of the past, one of the most dangerous global challenges and threat to modern civilisation which should have no place in our life. And we have no other alternative.

We stand for global partnership.

We stand for unity.