



BELARUS

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

5 MARCH 2007

**STATEMENT
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OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS**

First of all, allow me, on behalf of the Republic of Belarus, to extend our deep appreciation to our partners – co-sponsors of the International Conference – UN Office on Drug and Crimes, Permanent Mission of the Philippines to the UN and Vital Voices Global Partnership. We also thank all participants who supported the initiative to hold this conference.

Belarus highly appreciates an opportunity to hold such an important and large event in the headquarters of the most authoritative international organisation.

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the abolition of transatlantic slavery. Meanwhile, the number of contemporary slaves – victims of human trafficking – grows annually. Modern slavery has not become more humane. On the contrary, it became much more devious and brutal. Most vulnerable social groups – young women and children – are ever more often getting entrapped in the trafficker's network.

So why does this not just uncivilised but a truly disgraceful phenomenon prosper in a civilised world? Is it the case of well-skilled traffickers or are the efforts undertaken by states and the entire international community not sufficient?

Probably, both. Not always efficient and coordinated enough, response to the challenge of trafficking sometimes plays into the criminals' hands.

Based on her own experience, Belarus came to understand how critical for the success of fighting human trafficking it is to have a unified programme of action and an effective coordination mechanism.

Because of her geographical location, Belarus is overflowed with significant westward streams of illegal migration and human trafficking. Belarusians themselves also become an 'export commodity'.

This is why the Republic of Belarus was the first in the post-Soviet area to launch a large-scale fight against traffickers of human beings.

The state takes most decisive measures to stop human trafficking. In addition to being a party to all international conventions on fighting human trafficking, the Republic of Belarus has a progressive legal framework aimed at eradicating this phenomenon.

We proceed from an assumption that human trafficking should be fought in parallel in two directions. This is not only about stopping crimes. No less important is the eradication of the very foundation which brings to life this dangerous social phenomenon.

A key element of this work is to ensure economic and social stability in the country.

Our state does its best to provide women, young people, all those who may become victims of trafficking an opportunity to use their own potential in their own country and not seek easy money abroad. To that end Belarus created a system of support of young talents of every kind. Belarusian women successfully realise their potential in politics, business, culture and other spheres.

Our country has made great strides in reducing unemployment – today it stands at 1.2 percent and continues to decrease. However, unemployment among women and youth is still a challenge.

State programme of comprehensive measures on fighting human trafficking and prostitution is implemented in Belarus. The appropriate coordination mechanism was created under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior.

In March 2005 the President of Belarus signed a decree on 'Measures to Fight Human Trafficking'. The decree seeks to provide more systemic regulation of activities that may potentially serve as channels for human trafficking. These are services for work and study abroad, modelling business, marriage agencies, international adoption.

I would like to stress that the target of these measures is not to put a ban on working and studying abroad, being a catwalk model etc. The state's main goal is to ensure that an individual has an opportunity to receive objective information, to make an independent choice on the basis of this information and to get a job or services that he or she conscientiously agreed to.

As it is known, basic tricks used by recruiters to engage potential victims into international trafficking are fraud, deceit, lack of information about future jobs and employers, working conditions, accommodation, hazy promises about incredible wages.

In our country we have an adequate response to all these challenges. We have established legal mechanisms which provide maximum protection to people who go abroad in search of work. Companies offering employment abroad, disseminating information about individuals to strike up acquaintances and training models need to get a special license. They are obliged not only to provide full and objective information on the nature and conditions of a proposed job but also to check the credibility of this information.

We have set a task for our diplomatic missions to strengthen the protection of rights and legitimate interests of our citizens – victims of trafficking. Diplomatic missions take measures to return trafficking victims home, including furnishing them with appropriate documents.

A special Presidential Executive Order has been enacted to define the legal status of trafficking victims in our country. It provides for social protection, rehabilitation, legal and medical and other types of assistance. It also prohibits the disclosure of information about victims. In Belarus there is a mechanism in place to provide protection to trafficking victims in the course of criminal process.

Today we have every right to state that in our state we have established in a relatively short period of time a normative legal framework on fighting international trafficking which is truly unique in terms of its large-scale and comprehensive nature. We are ready to share our own experience and take over all progressive achievements from other countries and international organisations.

Unfortunately, such a social phenomenon as human trafficking cannot be effectively dealt with through legal measures alone. This joint work should be multidirectional to ensure timely countering to the constantly changing and improving ploys of traffickers.

This is why in Belarus the unified system of fighting human trafficking includes not only state institutions but also more than 10 NGOs. They provide consultative, psychological and legal assistance, engage in information campaigns. NGOs also launch hotlines that give all victims of trafficking a possibility to share information on what has happened and to get proper assistance.

The Regional Office of the International Organization for Migration operates in our capital.

One hundred and fifty-six specialised regional centres work in Belarus to minimise negative social consequences of trafficking and provide rehabilitation to its victims. More than 240 socio-educational centres have been established for adolescents. Rehabilitation shelter for trafficking victims was established in Minsk.

Overall, dozens of regional and national programmes on prevention of human trafficking and rehabilitation of its victims have been adopted in Belarus. It is important that social protection and rehabilitation are provided for free and include

accommodation, food, legal, psychological and medical help, employment assistance, family search and other forms of assistance.

In Belarus trafficking in person has not become a large-scale phenomenon. But we believe that evil should be eliminated at its inception. The Ministry of the Interior holds regular coordination meetings with the interested state agencies. Every six months the state of fighting human trafficking is reported to the President of the Republic of Belarus.

We believe that a similar model could be used at the international level too.

We are extremely pleased that the initiative of Belarus which was proposed at the United Nations in 2005 on the creation of a Global Partnership against Slavery and Trafficking in Persons has been elaborated further. Firstly, in the General Assembly resolution 'Improving the coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons' adopted in December 2006. Secondly, in the run-up to the Global Conference against Human Trafficking to be held in Vienna in November 2007.

An inter-agency coordination group created in accordance with the resolution should ensure a regular exchange of information between interested international organisations.

This group, in our opinion, may become a good foundation for establishing on a voluntary basis the Global Partnership against Slavery and Trafficking in Human Beings in the 21st century with participation of Member States, international organisations, civil society and mass media.

We propose to begin right now at this conference the process of drafting a joint UN strategy on combating human trafficking. This strategy should ensure complementary and mutually enforcing nature of all anti-trafficking measures of UN agencies and other international organisations.

Today it is extremely important to increase the efficiency of cooperation among law enforcement agencies in investigating trafficking crimes. To that end the INTERPOL mechanisms for data-sharing between the law enforcement agencies should be used more actively.

We should pay greater attention to international cooperation while preparing reports of Member States on implementation of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

Here and there we hear complaints about insufficient commitment of this or that country to fighting human trafficking. Sometimes this criticism takes place of actual technical or other assistance to that country in improving its legislation, creating well-trained anti-trafficking units or holding effective preventive information campaigns.

After all, we have a common goal that we can achieve only through common action. Human trafficking, like corrosion, erodes civilisation.

Let me express our common aspiration for the all-round consolidation of joint efforts in preventing the crime of human trafficking, especially in women and children.

It is even more important that all stakeholders realise that this process is multi-dimensional. We will never defeat this social evil unless there is effective counteraction to factors that push people into trafficker's hands. And these are poverty, inequality, lack of education. We will never defeat this social evil unless we decisively address the challenges that fuel the demand for trafficking – corruption, impunity of those who buy the services of victims, etc.

We are ready for this cooperation and we are confident that this conference will mark an important stage in advancing joint efforts of the whole international community on fighting international crime.