

CONCEPT PAPER

While slavery and the slave trade were abolished centuries ago by the French revolution, the British Parliament and the 13th amendment to the American Constitution, human trafficking and modern forms of human exploitation are not part of history. They are a booming international trade, making huge profits at the expense of exploited victims.

Just as in the past, we have the moral duty and the legal obligation to prevent and suppress these practices. The United Nations *Office on Drugs and Crime* (UNODC), in collaboration with other key United Nations partners and with the initial generous support of the United Arab Emirates, has therefore launched a global initiative to fight human trafficking. Promoted by the United Nations through events and projects around the world, this framework for action is designed to stamp out a crime that has no place in the modern world. It is a global movement designed to motivate governments, inspire international institutions, empower civil society, strengthen corporate responsibility, build regional alliances, galvanize international media support and mobilize resources.

Joining Forces

There are international Conventions against human trafficking. Yet, they are still not universally adhered to and implementation remains inadequate. Very few criminals are convicted and most of the victims never receive any assistance.

Even the true extent of this crime is unknown: this in itself is a problem that deserves further attention. The criminal nature of the phenomenon, the lack of legislation and the apparent benign neglect of the underlying suffering make information collection a challenge. Even matters of definition and common understanding of issues are yet to be clarified. The tip of the iceberg is in front of our eyes: but how much of it is submerged? Evidence suggests that the problem is global, significant and growing. Dedicated individuals and groups around the world are trying to do something about it: this initiative is meant to systematize this enormous good will and prove a framework for coherent action.

At the international level, a number of UN agencies and regional programs have dealt with aspects of human trafficking: these institutions have been working together in the initiative's preparatory phase, through a 6-member Steering committee. Among them is UNODC as the guardian of the UN Protocol against trafficking in persons; UNICEF because of its protection of child from violence, abuse and exploitation; the ILO protecting against forced labour and child labour; the IOM for the protection of migrant workers; and OHCHR as custodian of the anti-slavery legal instruments. Regional organizations like the OSCE play an important role in related areas. Since 2006 a broader range of activities have been, more loosely, coordinated through an Inter-Agency cooperation group (or ICAT) against human trafficking.

At the grass roots where the problem is most acute, non-governmental organizations and other civil society groups play a key role. They are the eyes and ears of the global community, and are in the front line of the anti-trafficking movement, protecting victims and helping the survivors.

A number of private individuals, either through foundations, the media or on their own initiative, are champions of the anti-trafficking cause. Their work, either to raise global awareness or to tackle local problems, is an inspiration to us all. If these various initiatives at different levels and in different parts of the world could unite, the chances of ending human trafficking would increase significantly.

Therefore, the initiative aims to harness and synergize these efforts, get others to join them, and set in motion a broad-based global movement that will attract the political will and resources needed to stop human trafficking. UNODC is the facilitator of the process, channeling existing efforts into a cohesive framework rather than re-inventing the wheel.

It is time to join forces to end human trafficking. This is a global problem that requires a global solution. The Global Initiative creates a common banner under which we can all rally.

What is the objective?

The Global Initiative, nicknamed with the acronym GIFT, will be rolled out in three phases.

The process was formally launched in March 2007. From this date until November 2007, the preparatory, first phase will increase awareness and knowledge about human trafficking, identify partners in the fight against it, and mobilize financial resources to support action. A series of regional events involving relevant stakeholders will examine both the causes of vulnerability (to trafficking) and the range and magnitude of the impact of this crime. For example, attention will be focused on the plight of girls sold by their families; child soldiers drugged and forced into combat; men bonded in mines and farms; women enslaved in quarries or domestic labour; boys coerced to fish under dangerous conditions; humans chained to do what others would never freely do – all for practically no pay. Other sessions will examine what society can do – in order to turn occasional benign negligence into remedial action. What can the media, the entertainment industry, the tourism industry, or information technology do to help the cause? Specialized dialogues with faith based communities, parliaments and civil society will help raise awareness among potential victims. We will also be raising funds to help the most vulnerable.

At the centre of the second phase will be a conference hosted in Vienna on 27-29 November 2007. The purpose of this conference is to take stock of advances made under the Initiative in 2007 and set the direction for follow-up measures to prevent and stop human trafficking. It will also assess the lessons learned regarding the dimensions of the issue and the current plan of action. The conference will focus on three themes:

1. vulnerability: why such a tragedy?
2. impact: human faces and humanitarian costs
3. action: a coalition to end human trafficking and exploitation

The third phase is the operational phase. Projects and needs identified in the earlier, preparatory period will start being implemented with the resources committed to a special purpose fund. The fund is being designed to have a sustained impact at the local and regional levels. An informal co-ordination group of multilateral institutions would ensure depth and breadth to the range of activities to be funded. National ownership of the projects will guarantee the initiative's long-term success. Projects will be selected and steps taken to increase the capacity of States to turn

their good intentions into practice, and leverage major resources into civil society directed grass roots initiatives that benefit those most directly affected by human trafficking.

The Global Initiative aims to:

1. **raise awareness** – tell the world about human trafficking and mobilize people to stop it;
2. **strengthen prevention** – inform vulnerable groups, alleviate the factors that make people vulnerable to trafficking (such as poverty, underdevelopment and lack of opportunity);
3. **reduce demand** – attack the problem at its source through lowering incentives to trade, and lowering demand for the products and services of exploited people;
4. **support and protect the victims** – ensure housing, counseling, medical, psychological and material assistance, keeping in mind the special needs of women and children and people at risk like those in refugee camps and conflict zones;
5. **improve law enforcement** – improve intelligence exchange between law enforcement agencies on international trafficking routes, traffickers profiles in order to dismantle criminal groups, leading to the conviction of more traffickers.
6. **implement international commitments** – ensure that international agreements are turned into national laws and practice by targeting assistance to countries in need and improving monitoring of implementation;
7. **enrich knowledge** – deepen world understanding of the scope and nature of human trafficking by more data collection and analysis, joint research initiatives and creating an evidence-based report on global trafficking trends;
8. **strengthen partnership** – build up regional and thematic networks involving civil society, inter-governmental organizations and the private sector;
9. **create a special purpose fund** – to attract and leverage resources into funding projects around the world committed to ending human trafficking;
10. **create an informal contact group** – to give like-minded Member States a strong sense of ownership in the process and create long-term momentum.

In the process, the Global Initiative can contribute to reaching **UN Millennium Development Goals** like empowering women, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, eradicating poverty and improving education.