

First of all, thank you very much for the invitation to this event. It is a great pleasure and honor for me to say a few words about our approach on how to protect endangered persons. When I say our approach, I mean first the Criminal Intelligence Service Austria and second - as a member of the worldwide network on Witness Protection Units (68 states/organizations) coordinated by Europol - the common principles of this network.

Witness Protection is indeed a very complex matter, many aspects of which need to be carefully considered. Thousands of pages have been written by many sorts of experts from all the five continents so far. Experience has shown that there are no easy solutions in witness protection and that there is no perfect system that fits all size. If a Witness Protection Program is to be effective and successful it must be “fit for purpose” that should be the key message.

A fundamental principle is: The level of risk faced by a witness dictates the nature and extent of the protective measures that must be taken as well as their jurisdiction.

A range of procedural and non-procedural protection measures is necessary or can be applied to ensure that witnesses can testify freely and without intimidation, and that their life and that of their relatives and other persons close to them is protected before, during and after trial.

The application of a Witness – and Victim Protection Program with a full range of protection measures (change of identity,

relocation, and financial support, among others) shall only arise in case of high-risk cases. Therefore, a Witness- and Victim Protection Program must be considered as a matter of last resort. Only if other measures have proved as inefficient or ineffective such programs should be applied.

If I have learned nothing else during my time in the witness protection business and particularly in delivering trainings in several countries around the world, it is that those of us doing this work are members of a small family throughout the world.

I have seen over the years that our witness protection problems in Austria and even in Europe are not unique. The legal basis in the states may be different but the people which deals with witness protection around the world are facing the same difficult challenges and doing pretty much the same things to protect threatened witnesses as we are in Austria. That said firstly we can still learn from each other and secondly – as far as I know – nobody has a magic formula for success in our field.

Again, if a Witness Protection Program is to be effective and successful it must be 'fit for purpose'. Designed to deliver a robust, vibrant and meaningful service both to those people admitted to its care and the justice system in support of which it has been established, the program must be tailored according to the organizational, cultural and diverse needs of each individual country.

Witness protection programs should be set up and made available to witnesses and victims of crime who need protection in accordance with national witness protection legislation or internal regulation. These programs should, where feasible in the context of the competent authority, be implemented, supervised and coordinated by specialized witness protection units with the required degree of autonomy, and their main objective should be to support the criminal justice process by safeguarding the life, personal security and well-being of witnesses and collaborators of justice, and people close to them, aiming in particular at providing the appropriate physical, psychological, educational, social and financial protection and support. States should ensure that these units are adequately staffed, resourced, and trained, and have access to covert logistics and finances, in order to provide adequate protection and support to persons in the protection program.

Dedicated witness protection units specifically dealing with the protection of witnesses and victims should be established where feasible in the context of the competent authority. These units should be staffed with highly specialized personnel with required expertise including, but not limited to, in the fields of physical security and protection, reidentification and legend building, covert logistics and finances, psychosocial assessment and support, information and communication technologies, threat and risk assessment, care and financial management. Specialized

personnel should also be available for vulnerable groups of witnesses, such as victims, including victims of sexual and gender-based violence, minors, or witnesses with medical or special needs. Due consideration should also be given to ensuring adequate gender representation, language expertise and knowledge and sensitivity to ethnic, cultural, and religious needs of witnesses and collaborators of justice in the program. Adequate and continuous training should regularly be provided to personnel in order to ensure the highest degree of protection, confidentiality and support to individuals in programs, including in the fields of information and communication technologies, digital security and cyber-security.

In 1998, when I and another officer were tasked to build up a Witness Protection Unit, we soon realised that the only way to successfully accomplish such a job was through close international cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen, the fact that many criminal groups are operating on an international level makes combating them more difficult. Organised Crime and Terrorism do not stop on national borders. The fight against these criminal groups is a global challenge and global challenges needs global answers. All of us know there is a growing demand for witness protection and from my point of view witness Protection is one of the most powerful skills in the fight against organised crime.

Thank you for your attention!