

COP Statement Amb. Schneebauer, 13.10.2020

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Trafficking in human beings constitutes a pressing criminal phenomenon and a severe violation of Human Rights, and needs to be fought global, regional and local level.

Due to its geographical position in the centre of Europe, Austria is affected by human trafficking both as a transit and destination country. In order to coordinate and intensify anti-trafficking measures in Austria, a Task Force on Combating Human Trafficking was set up in 2004. In this Task Force, all relevant ministries and government bodies, regional authorities, unions and employers associations and specialized Non-Governmental organisations are represented.

Every year around the EU Anti-Trafficking Day in October, the Task Force organises a conference to raise awareness and to share knowledge among experts in the field of combating human trafficking.

This year's conference, which starts tomorrow, will – because of the pandemic - be held virtually under the theme of "Human Trafficking in Times of Corona". It will examine the consequences of the lockdown and other developments caused by COVID-19 on actual and possible measures to combat human trafficking. Attention will be paid to the precarious employment conditions in a variety of areas, disclosed by the pandemic, including seasonal workers in the tourist industry and harvesters in the agricultural sector. By consolidating our efforts, we intend to develop targeted approaches regarding the identification of victims as well as their protection in the special conditions caused by COVID-19.

Please let me conclude by highlighting the importance of global and international cooperation in combating human trafficking. The United Nations, in particular the Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, the European Union, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Centre of Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) make important contributions in this respect. Austria supports these organisations in their efforts to combat human trafficking and is honoured that many of the activities take place in Vienna, which therefore may be called a "hub of expertise" in the field of combating Human Trafficking.

Thank you!