

“ Countering Child Trafficking: A United Response to a Global Problem”

Panelists representing the UNOHCHR, the ILO, IOM and UNICEF, the All-China Women’s Federation, and a young person from Nepal, described situations of children who had been trafficked, as well as rescue, rehabilitation and prevention efforts, and recommended both principles to be adopted in this work and strategies that appeared to have had an impact.

Moderated by: Karin Landgren, Chief - Child Protection Section, UNICEF

Panelists (in order of speaking)

- Youth Representative, Sanjog Takhuri, (President of Hatemalo Youth Club in Nepal)
- Mrs. Yongling Chen, Deputy Director for International Liaison Department, All-China Women’s Federation
- Mrs. Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Mr. Frans Roselaers, Director of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour , ILO-IPEC
- Mrs. Ndioro Ndiaye, Deputy Director General – International Organisation for Migration
- Ms. Rima Salah, Regional Director for West and Central Africa, UNICEF

Sixteen-year old Sanjog Thakuri from Nepal opened the event by describing his efforts to advocate against child trafficking. Through drama and song, Sanjog’s children’s club, Hatemalo, seeks to change attitudes that lead to the exploitation of children. Sanjog challenged the international community to wipe out the lucrative business of child trafficking through the involvement of children, “Children are changemakers. We are not crawling insects, but butterflies. We are birds of freedom.”

ILO Representative Frans Roselaers stated, “Trafficking is a double violation of human rights: ” the trafficking itself, and also because it becomes a gateway to other human rights violations when the trafficked children become victims of sexual exploitation or other worse forms of child labour. Mrs. Ndiaye from IOM stated that “Trafficking is the worst form of illegal migration.”

It is estimated that in Asia alone, over the past 30 years, 30 million women and children have been trafficked for sexual exploitation. Each year, 5,000-7,000 Nepalese girls are trafficked to India. In 1997, China’s Public Security Bureau reported 6,000 cases of trafficked children. In Guatemala, according to UNICEF estimates, 1,500 babies are trafficked abroad every year for adoption by foreign couples in North America and Europe. Asian and Eastern European girls as young as 13 are trafficked as ‘mail-order brides’. In West and Central Africa, large numbers of children are trafficked for domestic work, sexual exploitation, to work in shops or on farms or to be scavengers and street hawkers.

What are the underlying causes of child trafficking?

Poverty emerges as a major causal factor for trafficking. President Iliescu supported this premise, "Fighting this phenomenon means fighting poverty". Ms. Rima Salah of UNICEF highlighted some of the other underlying causes such as "lack of vocational opportunities, insufficient and/or inaccessible schooling, inadequate or non-existent protective legislation and poor law enforcement. This is exacerbated by the political, and economic instability, the prevalence of armed conflict in some countries, and most importantly, by lack of knowledge of the families, the youth and children of the risks that are involved in trafficking".

Guidelines and principles on trafficking introduced by Mrs. Mary Robinson, U.N. High Commissioner on Human Rights, seek to tackle the problem as it affects children, "in the most holistic and well-rounded way in the best interests of the child". The guidelines urge special care for young victims of trafficking and stipulate that the definition of trafficking should be loosened when applied to children. Children should also not be held liable for any crimes they might commit while in the captivity of traffickers or the employers who receive them, and arrangements must be made to care for child victims who are unable to return home.

What are some of the practical examples of what can be done to counter child trafficking?

In a pilot programme launched over the past two years in villages along China's borders with Vietnam and Myanmar, the All-China Women's Federation has worked with school principals and set up community centres to raise awareness of the problem among girls and other at-risk segments of the population. The Government of Togo, in partnership with UNICEF, has developed a plan of action which aims at raising awareness at the grassroots level among poor families in order to challenge traditional beliefs about sending children away for education or work opportunities. In the Philippines, telephone hotlines to ensure victimized children can report abuses have been set up under government supported quick-response programmes. In police stations, women and children's help desks have been established to provide immediate counselling and services.

At the regional level in West Africa, an agreement between Benin and Togo and Gabon to ensure prosecution of traffickers flows from regional efforts addressing trafficking, including a bilateral agreement between Mali and Cote d'Ivoire.

President Iliescu described steps taken by his government to fight trafficking of children, in partnership with international organizations and civil society. The Romanian Government in collaboration with IOM and civil society has developed a National Plan of Action against Trafficking and anti-trafficking legislation complemented by a witness protection programme. The Government of Finland stated that trafficking of children is a true sign of failure by governments to protect children and called for global and regional cooperation". As we are increasing knowledge and funds, it is important to coordinate our

efforts as well. This means to bridge the links between child labour, trafficking and lack of registration. The Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000) is essential in this work".

Action Points

To fight the phenomenon:

- to promote community mobilization and vigilance to counter trafficking
- to strengthen multi-sectorial alliances across borders
- to undertake time-bound measures linked to national development goals
- to mobilize international cooperation and support
- to strengthen existing laws, including ILO Convention 182 and the Optional Protocols, their implementation in order to stop impunity at national and sub-regional levels.
- to raise awareness, including among children themselves, schools and parents

The President of Romania **His Excellency I. Iliescu**, called for "zero tolerance" as a universal rule for trafficking of children. Government representatives from Finland, the Philippines and Togo called for increased preventive and coordination efforts nationally, regionally and at the global level.

Mrs. Mary Robinson (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) concluded her presentation by saying, "We haven't begun to tackle this problem. It's time for us to take action".