



**United States Mission to the OSCE**  
**Statement on Humanitarian Issues: Combatting Trafficking in**  
**Human Beings at HDIM Session 11**

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Michael Kozak, Head of Delegation  
Warsaw  
September 18, 2017

The United States offers its continued support in the effort to save lives and protect those who are vulnerable to human trafficking, including migrants. While new migrant and refugee entries into the region declined by two-thirds in 2016, many participating States are still struggling to process and assist the 1.3 million migrants and refugees who entered in 2015.

Since the start of Europe's refugee and migration emergency, the State Department has contributed over \$72 million in humanitarian aid to create adequate reception arrangements for migrants and refugees and continues to provide emergency and life-saving assistance in the Western Balkans and Greece. In Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia we support programs to train national officials to identify vulnerable migrants—including victims of trafficking—and address their social inclusion. We support programs to assist migrants and refugees in Macedonia. The program organizes cross-border meetings with civil society organizations for effective assistance coordination. We are also working to assist Serbia in its response to vulnerable migrants, including asylum seekers pushed into Serbia by Hungary.

Migrant smuggling and human trafficking networks are working together to exploit vulnerabilities. The International Organization for Migration reported last year that at least 80% of migrants who arrived in the region from Nigeria, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea and the Cote D'Ivoire showed strong indicators of human trafficking at some point during their journey. The United States funds the Extra Budgetary Project implemented by the Special Representative and Coordinator to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings. The project trains law enforcement on how to identify and respond appropriately to trafficking victims.

According to the Department of State's 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report, the OSCE region saw only a slight increase in the identification of trafficking victims in 2016. We underscore the importance of screening migrants for human trafficking indicators by trained individuals, the provision of protection and assistance to trafficking victims, as well as access to temporary and longer-term residency status, and access to work permits for foreign victims.

Marginalized people are highly vulnerable to trafficking. We welcome Croatia's awareness raising campaign targeted toward Roma communities, Montenegro's identification of children vulnerable to domestic servitude in forced marriages, and Macedonia's efforts to protect Romani children forced into begging or selling on the streets by providing them safe environments and by prosecuting traffickers.

The Trafficking in Persons Report also noted that trafficking convictions in 2016 held steady in the OSCE region, but new prosecutions declined 46%. International organizations reported increased incidents of labor and sex trafficking of asylum-seekers. The increase was a result of reception centers offering inadequate protections to victims of trafficking and being too accessible to traffickers who recruit among the centers' residents.

Unaccompanied minors of both genders are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking. Safety at reception centers and, quick processing of applications for asylum will reduce their vulnerability. We commend Belgium for its efforts to identify and reduce exploitation at reception centers, including by training for staff and awareness-raising among the migrants.

The United States commends France for its new law that penalizes the purchase of commercial sex, thereby reducing the demand for it. France also launched a public awareness campaign on sex tourism during the Euro 2016 soccer championship, funding programs through airlines and tourism operators describing the penalties for child sex tourism. Luxembourg and the Netherlands undertook similar efforts.

As the United States is one of the countries of origin for sex tourists, we are leading an international cooperative alert system that will warn countries in advance about individuals who may travel for child sex tourism. We welcome our bilateral agreement with the UK and memorandum with Slovakia on reciprocal notifications, and invite other participating States to do the same. We encourage participating States that have not already done so to adopt and implement laws that permit prosecution of citizens who engage in child sex tourism.

Ukraine increased its anti-trafficking efforts in 2016; however, combatting Russian aggression continues to drain Ukrainian government resources, making funds for anti-trafficking programs scarce. Ongoing Russian aggression has caused nearly two million Ukrainians to be displaced. This population is particularly vulnerable to various forms of exploitation. We encourage Ukraine to redouble its efforts to identify and assist victims and to prosecute traffickers, ensuring they receive proportionate and dissuasive sentences.

While Russia eased the vulnerability to trafficking for citizens of some countries by issuing work permits, Russia expanded bilateral contracts with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Under the contracts, the DPRK operates labor camps on Russian soil, subjecting thousands of North Korean workers to forced labor. More generally, authorities routinely detained and deported potential forced labor victims without screening for signs of exploitation, prosecuted victims forced into prostitution for prostitution-related offenses, and offered no funding or programs to assist these trafficking victims. Russia has yet to draft a national strategy or assign roles to government agencies to remedy the trafficking within its borders.

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan continued to engage in forced labor by reportedly coercing thousands of citizens' participation in the cotton harvest. We encourage Turkmenistan to follow Uzbekistan's example by permitting third-party monitoring of the harvest. We urge both governments to transition to a harvest system that attracts voluntary workers through market wages and provides unimpeded access to monitors.

Our region also finds itself faced with a surge in crimes of opportunity against migrants and refugees who are new or who remain unsettled. While not at the humanitarian crisis levels of 2016, irregular migration continues and could potentially lead to a human trafficking crisis, unless participating States prioritize identification of victims and prosecution of traffickers, especially those preying on migrants at reception centers. We must do more next year than we did last. We look forward to the discussion of best practices toward that goal.

###