



END HUMAN TRAFFICKING NOW
Business Community
against the Trafficking of Human Beings
Athens Roundtable, 23 January 2006

The world's attention has become increasingly focused on the serious problem of human trafficking, the victims of which are overwhelmingly women and children, and usually migrants away from their countries or communities of origin.

A new global report on forced labour by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) suggests that the illicit profits realized per year from trafficked forced labourers – US\$ 32 billion – are far greater than has so far been understood. Half of this is made in industrialized countries and close to one third in Asia. Some US\$ 28 billion per year is made from sexual exploitation of women and US\$ 4 billion annually from other forms of economic exploitation.

It is estimated that there are 12.3 million victims of forced labour in the world today, of whom some 2.45 million are trafficked (ILO). Of these, most are trafficked into forced labour for commercial sexual exploitation, while one third are trafficked for other economic exploitation. Over half of the persons subject to forced economic exploitation, and almost all those subject to forced commercial sexual exploitation, are women.

The trafficking in human beings for the purpose of forced prostitution has increased at a furious rate in recent years. Every year hundreds of thousands of women and children from poor areas are deceived and forced to work as prostitutes. Those affected are poor, often unemployed. They are powerless and their human rights are violated.

Sexual exploitation represents a major part of the trafficking industry as shown by the data gathered by ILO, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the European Union, the State Department of the United States of America, many nongovernmental organisations and others.

Most of this exploitation takes place in the underground economy, and done through the illegal sex industry. The traffickers have been linked with unscrupulous recruiting or contracting agencies.

There are many reasons why the business community and each CEO in particular should focus more on this issue.

Recent reports by ILO, the US State Department and others indicate that trafficked people are subject to forced labour exploitation in a range of economic sectors in addition to the sex industry.

This forced labour can even penetrate the supply chain of major companies, perhaps without board members being aware.

In some sectors and countries forced labor represent a serious threat to legitimate business.

Opportunities

The involvement of the private sector in partnership with others is imperative in addressing the serious and growing problem of human trafficking, in particular of women and children for sexual exploitation. It is within this context that representatives of the business community are coming together during a roundtable, to explore ways and means of moving forward. The roundtable will be held in Athens on 23 January 2006.

The link between the spread of HIV/AIDS and trafficking cannot be overemphasized. The leadership role and firm stand of the private sector and particularly companies in combating the spread of HIV/AIDS will be greatly enhanced through their active commitment and involvement in putting a halt on the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation.

Hotels and entertainment enterprises are an obvious starting place. They can be directly affected by the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation within their premises, and would need to exercise constant vigilance. Transport industries have a key role in prevention, alerting transport officials to the danger of cross-border trafficking, or disseminating information to all travellers on the subject.

A general commitment against human trafficking can be included in advertising and publicity brochures, together with advice on how to act in suspected cases of abuse. Companies can also support hot-lines established by national and regional authorities. Airlines and shipping industries have roles of obvious importance, with their capacity (as some countries have done in their major airports) to have high-profile publicity campaigns against forced labour and trafficking.

In short, there are many things that business can do to confront the various forms of human trafficking but as the issues are often complex, it is important to have a step-by-step approach.

The roundtable is organised under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is co-hosted by one of the leading business company Motor Oil, and cosponsored by prominent international organisations in the fight against human trafficking – the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF). The roundtable brings together CEOs from the private sector, representatives of NGOs, international organisations, governments and individuals to develop a set of ethical principles to fight human trafficking, in particular women and children. It is envisaged that some of the CEOs present would then address the forthcoming annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos which starts on 25 January 2006 as an essential means of alerting the global business community.

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