



Final press release on Athens Roundtable
of Business community
against the Trafficking of Human Beings

Geneva, 25 January 2006

The campaign “End Human Trafficking Now” is launched with the private sector

*Initiative to be presented to business community at the Davos World Economic Forum
on 27 January 2006*

On 23 January 2006, in Athens, 41 CEOs at the roundtable of business community against trafficking in human beings pledged to fight human trafficking and supported the Athens ethical principles under the motto “End Human Trafficking Now”. H.E. Suzanne Mubarak hailed this “giant step” and pledged to publicize the ethical principles further and elicit more support for them at the coming Davos World Economic Forum. She said, “the challenge that faces all of us today is to make sure that the ethical principles against trafficking in human beings, especially women and children, become powerful tools that we can use in the coming months to launch this campaign”.

The Athens roundtable, which was opened by H.E. Suzanne Mubarak, was addressed by Queen Silvia of Sweden. It was attended by Queen Sabeeka of Bahrain, as well as 120 participants, including such eminent personalities as Ronald K. Noble, the Secretary General of Interpol.

Trafficking in human beings is the third largest growing criminal activity in the world, just behind the arms and drug trade. It is estimated that 2.5 million people are trafficked across international borders every year, the majority being young women and children for sexual exploitation. Forced labor of trafficked persons, according to the ILO, raises profits of US\$ 32 billion a year, including US\$ 28 billion from sexual exploitation of women and children, half of which is in industrialized countries. The French music composer Jean-Michel Jarre stated that one person was being trafficked for sexual exploitation every three seconds. The victims are always the most vulnerable, children and women living in poverty, mostly in developing countries and in countries in transition, which are brought into this illegal traffic through force, deception and violence. This core problem has been exacerbated by globalization, including the use of the Internet. Illegal trafficking also brings huge and quick benefits. Some participants recalled that traffickers are “reimbursed” in three months of their “investment”, while the victims can be sold over and over again, making this crime highly lucrative. A participant recalled that the deep rooted causes of human trafficking were organized crime, the lack of opportunity to work in the source country, and governments as well as other actors turning a blind eye on the crime of using people as commodities.

Numerous legal instruments aiming to end slavery and human trafficking have been adopted at the international and national levels, but the phenomenon continues to grow.

As a global problem, human trafficking demands global solutions and requires all sectors of society to work together for its elimination. The End Human Trafficking Now campaign considers that activities of governments and nongovernmental organizations in curbing human trafficking could be enhanced immeasurably by pressure from the business world. Its potential to make a difference is considerable and the chief aim of the Athens initiative was to convince business community to take an active part in ending human trafficking, especially sex trade in women and children.

As stated by H.E. Suzanne Mubarak at the close of the meeting, “this is the beginning of a long journey which today has involved you the business community who has decided to join the global effort in eliminating this scourge:

- by saying ‘no’ to human trafficking with zero tolerance
- by formulating an anti-trafficking policy that is implemented in all corporate activities and strategy
- by guaranteeing your reputation and integrity in ensuring the full compliance of your employees
- by rallying other business partners and suppliers to this cause and engaging in business that is not built on profits at any cost but on social responsibility that maximizes the wellbeing of all.

[...] Together we will work hard in diminishing incentives that makes this trade such a profitable one and we will mobilize the public at large so that they too become a powerful force thereby creating the conditions that will prevent it from flourishing”.

The Athens roundtable agreed on an action plan for the implementation of the ethical principles, including awareness-raising among the business community, starting on 27 January 2006 at the Davos World Economic Forum. At the initiative of Mr. David Arkless, Senior Vice President Corporate Affairs of Manpower, Mrs. Deborah Cundy, Vice President of Carlson Companies, and Mr. Shafik Gabr, Chairman of the Arab Business Council, and Chairman and Managing Director of the Artoc Group for Investment and Development, and the CEOs present in Athens decided to create a working group to follow up on the meeting, which the ILO offered to host later in the year.

The Athens roundtable to end trafficking in human beings, a 21st century form of slavery, was attended by representatives of governments, international intergovernmental organizations and nongovernmental organizations, as well as the private sector, demonstrating that like-minded entities can make a difference when joining forces on world issues as is being done by the Global Coalition. The roundtable was organized under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mrs. Marianna Vardinoyannis, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, hosted the event at the Zappeion Megaron, in Athens, on 23 January 2006.

The roundtable was coordinated by Dr. Aleya El-Bindari Hammad, a founding member and member of the board of End Human Trafficking Now, and moderated in the morning by Ms. Lyse Doucet, journalist of BBC World, and in the afternoon, by Ms. Zohreh Tabatabai, Director of Communication of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The roundtable was cosponsored by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), represented by Amb. Theodor Winkler, Director; the International Organization for Migration (IOM), represented by Mrs. Ndioro Ndiaye, Deputy Director General; UNIFEM, represented by Mrs. Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, Programme Director for the Arab Region; the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), represented by Mrs. A. Sumru Noyan, Deputy Executive Director; the World Bank, represented by Mrs. Nadereh Chamlou, Senior Advisor; and the Foundation for the Child and Family, represented by Mrs. Marianna Vardinoyannis, Founder and President.

As a background document to the Athens roundtable, the book “Trafficking Women and Children, Overcoming the illegal sex trade”, was published by the Refugee Studies Centre of the University of Oxford. End Human Trafficking Now also organized the presentation of two films, “Lilya 4ever” and “Human Trafficking”, produced by Lifetime.

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