



Remarks by

H.R.H. Princess Mathilde of Belgium

“Vulnerable People at Risk”

at the

Opening Session of the

**END HUMAN TRAFFICKING NOW: ENFORCING THE UN PROTOCOL
Luxor International Forum**

11 December 2010
Luxor, Egypt

Mrs. Mubarak,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I come from a country firmly engaged in the fight against human trafficking. It was therefore with wholehearted commitment that I accepted Mrs. Mubarak's invitation to participate in this international gathering. May I congratulate you, Mrs. Mubarak, for your steadfast support for this cause. It is very much one I share.

Two decades ago, His Majesty King Baudouin was at the forefront of the fight to protect the victims of what is in fact a modern form of slavery. Since then, Her Majesty Queen Paola has taken several initiatives to draw attention to this issue, among which recently the problem of vulnerable children on the run. Furthermore, Belgium has given high priority to the issue of human smuggling, trafficking and exploitation at both a national and international level. It is for this reason that I am particularly moved to be here today. And I am deeply committed to adding my voice to all efforts to increase public awareness of those at risk worldwide.

We are facing today a problem that touches us all. No country is immune from such heinous crimes as sexual and economic exploitation and forced labour, where women, children and young people are the most vulnerable.

I know everyone will agree with me that education plays a vital role in tackling this problem – as does the empowerment of women. It is important to promote this further, as it is women who are highly involved in human trafficking – not just as victims – but also – it seems as perpetrators. Children too need our protection. And good governance and the alleviation of poverty are key elements in our approach to this complex phenomenon. Impunity from the crime of human trafficking should never be tolerated.

From the very start, Belgium has worked closely with the European Union and its other member states, adopting a pragmatic, integrated and comprehensive approach to the crime of human trafficking – a crime which is in the main transnational. More partnerships need to be built, and this Luxor Conference aims to do just that.

Human trafficking is not a crime that should be considered in isolation. It is very much one that is linked to complex issues within society.

My involvement with UNICEF and UNAIDS has taken me all over the world, and I have seen just how much support is required for those who have been denied the possibility to develop their full potential, through lack of education and nutrition or proper health care. I would particularly like to mention the HIV/Aids pandemic which is tearing apart whole communities – leaving children orphaned and unprotected. And may I focus too on violence against women, especially in conflict zones. Children – orphans – can all too easily disappear in the confusion of war. Women can all too

easily be exploited. Exposing these vulnerable members of society to the additional painful reality of human trafficking inflicts on them lifelong damage, from which many of them will never fully recover.

It is vital therefore to link up with other ongoing efforts and to coordinate initiatives, so that actions are mutually reinforcing.

Cooperation between traditional partners is no longer enough. Working with the private sector – with the business communities – is gaining momentum. In fact the contribution the private sector is making towards both the detection and prevention of human trafficking has become crucial.

Tomorrow, the first ever ‘Business Leader’s Award’ will be made to an individual business leader who has had considerable impact on the ground. This award should encourage businesses to become more involved in concrete actions to eradicate human trafficking. I am especially happy about this. I believe strongly in positive incentives for continued action and I am indeed pleased to be part of this unique endeavor.

I find it most encouraging that this Forum will end on such a high note – and send out such a positive message of hope.

I congratulate the organizers of this timely and important Luxor Forum for their initiative, and for the vision that inspired it.

Thank you.