



Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

Commission des Eglises auprès des Migrants en Europe

Kommission der Kirchen für Migranten in Europa

Contribution of Caritas Europa and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) to the IOM/EU Stop Conference "Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings" 18-20 September 2002, Brussels

On behalf of European Christian organisations working for refugees and migrants, we would like to express our appreciation for holding this important conference on "Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings". We believe that the presence of such a number of high-ranking delegations is an encouraging sign for the commitment to the struggle against trafficking in human beings, and we hope that a dynamic will be created which can give a boost to increased international cooperation in this field.

Many of our member organisations across Europe are actively involved in the social assistance to and counselling of trafficked people. Based on their experience, we would like to add a few thoughts to the debate hoping that these will also be reflected in the envisaged Brussels Declaration. Many contributions have already underlined the needs for increased police and judiciary cooperation. We would therefore like to underline some aspects concerning the assistance to victims.

Durable solutions for trafficked people

We want to stress the need for trafficked people to receive a form of protection, which is permanent and lasting. The current debate of a temporary form of protection for victims who cooperate with the authorities goes into the right direction, but not yet far enough. We have to understand that victims are unlikely to cooperate with the relevant authorities when they have to be afraid that they will be sent back home after a certain period and "back home" are likely to be confronted with the same criminal networks, against which they have been testifying.

It is obvious that returning home should be one option for victims, however, we should acknowledge that in order to make that a feasible option, the situation in countries of origin needs to be safe enough for the trafficked person and the family beyond the return. Some victims might be in need of permanent protection in the countries, which they have been trafficked to, and there should be a legal framework allowing for this. We believe the best solution for trafficked persons would include giving them the power of decision-making whether or not to return and when. For persons opting for return, protection in their home countries has to

be guaranteed. We are convinced that this requires an increased international cooperation between authorities as well as NGOs.

Protection for family members

The criminal networks of trafficking are often exercising pressure on the victims by threatening their families, so that the victims might not testify against the criminal networks. If we want the victims to co-operate we thus have to think about schemes of protection for victims and their families alike. However, this is an enormous task and may include schemes to help families to free themselves of debts which are frequently used as an argument by trafficking organisations. We are aware that this is an extremely sensitive issue, but solutions may be found in at least some areas.

Confidence building measures to ensure cooperation of trafficked people with the authorities

It goes without saying that the assistance and protection of trafficked persons can best be provided by NGO's and authorities together. Moreover it is a strong interest for the society to find the perpetrators and punish them. Some victims are afraid of cooperating with the police, because of negative previous experiences or the fear to be deported or fear to meet corrupt officials.

NGO's in many countries play a crucial role in this context. Very often they are the first points of contact for victims of trafficking. In quite a lot of cases, our member organisations have been able to both assist the victims, build up confidence and trust and encourage the victims to get in touch with the police and cooperate with public authorities in the fight against trafficking. For this kind of cooperation confidence building measures, such as round tables, discussion fora, between NGO's and authorities are needed. Developing this cooperation further could mean to have cooperation contracts between authorities and NGO's with a clear definition of the respective role, the tasks and the responsibilities. Cooperation between authorities and NGO's should be based on mutual respect for the different roles and in confidence acquired through a process of cooperation. NGO's could act as mediators between the victim and public authorities, transmitting the relevant information and the confidence experienced in the cooperation.

The work of the NGO's provides continuity and stability to trafficked people

NGO's with their services can provide trafficked people with a long term assistance, which in the majority of cases is needed, because of the degrading and traumatic experiences trafficked people went through. This assistance is the first step to rehabilitation and reorientation for trafficked people.

NGO's can give a valid contribution to the training of professionals

To deal with trafficked people requires specific skills and specific knowledge. NGO's often have long experience in dealing with migration, with different cultural

backgrounds and specifically with trafficked people. This experience should be put at the disposal of professionals of different backgrounds, especially representatives of authorities. Moreover these experiences could be worked off by researchers and reach future professionals in the social field.

Networking as a tool to raise awareness and assist victims

We believe that building up a network of international cooperation against trafficking in human beings is not only a responsibility of the states and intergovernmental organisations, but also of civil society. Networks of NGOs, are a good way to raise awareness in the public, as they have experience in the field and are present at the grassroots level. These efforts, especially transnational networks should be supported at European level. In the long run a coordination of these efforts is needed, to avoid duplication of work and to strengthen links between different existing networks. In addition, networks reaching different groups in societies are needed to create public awareness on the issue of trafficking. One of the problems not sufficiently raised publicly is in our opinion the demand for trafficked persons, particularly women and children.

CCME and Caritas Europa thus hope to launch the project "Christian Action and networking against trafficking in women (CAT)" in November 2002 The CAT project will create a network of Church related organisations against trafficking involving countries of origin, of transit and destination. One of the central aims is to create working tools for volunteers and church groups in order to sensitise them for the work with trafficked people.