

STATEMENT ON TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The United Nations and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimate that 4 million people are victims of the trade in human beings world-wide. Each year, 500 000 victims of this trade enter Western Europe.

Trading in human beings is a form of slavery in the 21st century, which affects men, women and children. The majority of victims are women who are used principally for sexual exploitation.

Trading in women is increasing steadily, largely due to their vulnerability, poverty and marginalisation in their country of origin.

The increase is explained by the large profits and limited risks enjoyed by traffickers, as well as by high demand for women in Europe, for the purpose of prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation.

Trafficking in women is a complex phenomenon which is a direct result of the demand for prostitutes, involving violations of human rights, the fight against organised crime, migration and visa policies, gender inequalities, poverty and socio-economic inequalities within and between countries.

The PES considers trafficking in human beings to be a global problem which calls for cooperation at the international level and requires a multi-disciplinary approach, focused on prevention, prosecution and actual sentencing of traffickers, as well as the provision of assistance to victims.

The PES highlights the need to view trading in women principally from the victims' perspective and to conceptualise this scourge in terms of violations of fundamental women's rights and not only in terms of the need to combat organised crime and irregular immigration. However, the irrefutable link between the trade in human beings and immigration and asylum policies should not be denied.

The PES points out that the conclusions of the Tampere European Council and the European Parliament resolution adopted on 19 May 2000 establish a clear mandate for the European Union to fight against the trade in human beings and particularly against the sexual exploitation of women and children. The mandate also calls for the adoption of laws which seek to establish a common definition of the trade in human beings, criminal actions, common sanctions and measures to assist victims.

The PES considers that a clear definition is a prerequisite for the fight against trading in women to be effective. The definition should cover all practices that are similar to slavery, such as sexual exploitation, forced labour and forced marriages.

The PES holds the view that the trade in human beings is to be condemned, and asks the member states to grant temporary protection and social support to victims of trafficking.

The PES considers that the European Union should ensure that its actions are co-ordinated so as to be consistent with the various international platforms such as the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the Beijing Conference, and calls on the Commission to draw fully on the potential of Articles 30, 31 and 34 of the European Union Treaty, in order to fight the trade in human beings for sexual exploitation.

The PES believes that the European Union and third countries must organise a joint information campaign addressed to women in order to explain to them clearly how the networks for trade in women operate, especially in future member countries in Central and Eastern Europe where trafficking is expanding steadily.

The PES also asks the Council to ensure that the Stop and Daphne programmes are endowed with sufficient budgets so that the various NGOs concerned with the trade in women can operate efficiently in the field.

The PES is committed to promoting measures and actions aimed at eliminating trafficking in human beings.