



# Human Trafficking and Peacekeeping Operations

**Dr. Helga Konrad**  
**OSCE Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings**

Moderated by Dr. Sarah E. Mendelson  
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On October 7, 2005, the Russia and Eurasia Program at CSIS in partnership with the Vital Voices Global Partnership hosted a discussion on human trafficking in the context of peacekeeping operations. Dr. Helga Konrad, OSCE Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, delivered remarks at the event. The following is a summary of her presentation.

Dr. Helga Konrad was appointed OSCE Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings by the OSCE Chair-in-Office on May 10, 2004. Prior to this, she chaired the Stability Pact Force on Trafficking in Human Beings for South Eastern Europe. In the late 1990s, she was a Federal Minister of Women's Issues in the Austrian government, as well as the Head of the Austrian government's delegation to the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing and the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, in Stockholm.

Human trafficking, including internal trafficking, has received an increasing amount of attention in recent years. Fifty five OSCE participating states have committed to combating the problem. "Human trafficking cannot be solved in a certain region," argued Dr. Konrad, who sees her role as a catalyst in supporting the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan dealing with human trafficking. As an important issue for South Eastern European states attempting to integrate into the EU, the battle against human trafficking is an ongoing process.

In light of recent trafficking incidents by peacekeeping personnel in Kosovo and the Congo there is a need for NGOs and international organizations such as the OSCE to help monitor the implementation of recent policies adopted by NATO, the United Nations, and the U.S. Department of Defense. Weak governments and institutions in the South Eastern Europe have created an environment favorable to "men in uniform" and "demand for sexual services". Meanwhile, as a result of several high-profile conferences anti-trafficking legislation and new criminal codes have been adopted by many European governments. In particular, many countries of South Eastern Europe have ratified the UN Protocol on human trafficking.

Amid signs of progress the situation regarding human trafficking has deteriorated. Trafficking has moved underground, shifting toward on-call services, massage clubs and private apartments. Criminals have invented more intricate methods to lure people into their schemes. Many victims are attracted by misleading offers to work abroad or fall into the trap of the so-called "lover boy" method - disguised online dating - and discover the intentions of traffickers only after crossing the border. The number of female and female-male couple recruiters is growing. Today, children account for the majority of assisted victims.

In the interim, victims find authorities to be of little help when they are caught in the restrictions of immigration legislation. “Many policy-makers assume that these people are migrants,” noted Dr. Konrad. As a result, authorities respond with measures envisaged by statutes on illegal immigration. Trafficked adults and children are detained, prosecuted and deported. Dr. Konrad underlined that this erroneous assumption is a serious obstacle, which leads, in particular, to the recycling of victims. “No distinction should be made between ‘nonguilty and guilty’ victims,” she added.

Dr. Konrad emphasized that victim identification is one of the most critical aspects of dealing with the issue. Most victims are unaccounted for and less than 40 percent are identified. “We must not deny that many victims of trafficking leave their home country voluntarily, with as low as 10 percent being kidnapped,” said Dr. Konrad.

“What is needed is a clear-cut responsibility by the governments, proper budgeting and resources,” Dr. Konrad remarked, outlining approaches and policies, which would contribute to solving the issue. First, communication between nongovernmental actors and law enforcement needs improvement in order to break the existing mutual mistrust. Secondly, there must be a period of recovery for the victim, prior to launching legal procedures. Thirdly, the so-called “victim-centered approach” is helpful for investigative accuracy since victims are the primary source of evidence. Another lesson learnt is that interrogation should not be exclusively carried out by police.

Additionally, thorough training rather than mere awareness raising campaigns among law enforcement officers would contribute to a more capable approach to the issue. Dr. Konrad also stressed the necessity to change the perception of victims, making it consistent with them as “victims of a crime and not criminals.” The goal of governments and nongovernmental actors is to disable human trafficking networks, with the masterminds behind these schemes being tracked down and apprehended. “Law enforcement must go after networks by targeting perpetrators along the origin-transit-destination route,” Dr. Konrad said, stressing that this was a challenging task but that milder measures would not be successful. Lastly, handling human trafficking should be an institutionalized mechanism within a country, with national coordination between ministries and agencies.

However, as Dr. Konrad noted, no well-designed program would help if weak policies persist. NATO and UN personnel can be prevented from being involved in trafficking only with the existence of zero-tolerance policies and suitable sanctions. “Risk of prosecution would be a helpful deterrent,” remarked Dr. Konrad. In addition, Dr. Konrad admitted considerable challenges exist in making leaders understand the issue and prosecute perpetrators. The issue of corruption was raised as another impediment to the solution. In many cases corrupt politicians support human trafficking, for instance, by forging documentation. Severe penalties have been recommended as a possible solution but, as Dr. Konrad concluded, the culture of corruption is not easily disrupted.

During the question and answer session, an interesting point on international legislative disparity was raised. Peacekeepers returning to their home countries might avoid prosecution if their respective states tolerate prostitution or other acts considered illegal in the country of their military service. To properly deal with this side of the issue, “we should see what human trafficking is.” “A measure of prostitution is not a measure against or in favor of human trafficking,” noted Dr. Konrad. She added that countries should take responsibility for their nationals involved in human trafficking.

Another question was related to the World Bank’s goal of poverty reduction. Dr. Konrad’s response implied that the Bank should not create the conditions which could facilitate human trafficking. In particular, she mentioned that countries dependent on adjustment loans had been forced to reduce social spending, causing nationals to migrate abroad and seek labor opportunities. “This could be a measure which indirectly supports human trafficking,” remarked Dr. Konrad.

In conclusion, Dr. Konrad stated that while human trafficking is a part of organized crime and organized criminals could threaten activists, this problem was a “violation of human rights, and slavery, not acceptable in the twenty-first century.”