

Welcome address: Ms Henriette Westhrin Deputy Minister of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

Good afternoon and welcome to this important conference on child trafficking. It is a privilege to be able to address you on this topic that concerns us all so much.

Children are our future. Children are a precious gift. They deserve our care, our concern and above all our protection.

Trafficking in children – whether it is for sexual purposes or for forced labour – cannot be tolerated. It is a horrendous and serious crime.

Forced labour is a problem that we often believe exists mostly in other parts of the world, but the problem is found everywhere, it just takes different shapes and forms.

Child trafficking is often the result of collapsed social bonds or the result of a social organization in which trafficking is accepted by some of its powerful members. To prevent child trafficking we need to identify and address its causes.

There are usually a multitude of causes in different places. Some involving individuals. Some at the community or state levels, and some involving the national, or even international, economy. The factors which facilitate child trafficking are equally diverse. There is no single solution that can be applied to everyone.

Children migrate for many reasons; they may leave their home country in search of economic opportunities, to join parents or relatives already living in the destination country, or to flee abusive situations in their home countries.

Some trafficked children are found to have experienced particular forms of abuse before being trafficked, for example family violence. In such cases, more proactive actions by social-workers could reduce levels of abuse and the likelihood that children will leave home.

UNICEF and others have encouraged states to identify the shortcomings in their child protection systems, which have failed to stop children from being trafficked. UNICEF's child protection programmes aim to prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and abuse against children.

Identifying minor victims of trafficking can prove to be a challenge, but we know that some children are at a higher risk of being trafficked than others. Marginalized children, abused children, poor children and children on the move are particularly exposed.

In Norway we distinguish between the identification of possible victims and the verification of victims of trafficking. All agencies, organisations or individuals who find themselves with grounds for concern that a person may be in a human trafficking situation, have a responsibility for identifying the person as a possible victim. They should put him or her in touch with the responsible authorities and assistance programmes.

People may also identify themselves as victims of human trafficking. But as we know, children do not always understand that's what they are. We often experience that children run away from their helpers and refuse the aid offered to them.

This is why we have decided on a new amendment in the Child Welfare Act. We want to protect these children from their traffickers, even when the children themselves do not want to be protected.

Everyone identified as a possible victim of trafficking, shall be treated as such with the rights and duties implied by this, until the contrary is proven. It is not required that a person is verified as a victim in order for him or her to be entitled to assistance and protection.

A possible victim of human trafficking may be verified as a victim by the police and prosecution authorities, the immigration authorities, or the Child Protection Service.

The Child Protection Service does not need to document that a child is a victim of human trafficking in order to initiate measures under the Child Protection Act.

Identifying good practices that can be replicated elsewhere is important. I would therefore like to conclude by mentioning two particular programmes in Norway.

First of all: The importance of information management and data collecting for statistical purposes is taken into account through The Coordinating Unit for Victims of Trafficking (KOM). This unit has also a mandate to coordinate the assistance and protection of victims.

Second: Is the work that is being done in screening unaccompanied minor asylum seekers at the reception centre for the newly arrived. When there are reasons for concern, the minor will be referred to the Child Protection Services. I would like to underline that The Norwegian Child Welfare Act applies to all children on Norwegian soil, regardless of their status.

The Norwegian Government has prepared a circular describing the Child Protection Service's responsibility for children victims of human trafficking.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Awareness is a good starting point in this line of work. In addition we need a framework, legislative measures and guidelines. Countries of origin, transit countries and destination countries for victims of trafficking have different challenges that have to be met by different approaches.

Co-operation on an international and national level is important, very important. Communication between national agencies and information sharing, registration and statistics are some crucial factors if we are to take the fight against trafficking in children a step forward.

I wish you all the best for these very important meeting.

Thank you!