

Statement by OSCE on need to strengthen anti-trafficking efforts in a time of crisis

OSCE (03.04.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2x68Fvq> – Valiant Richey, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, today issued the following statement, in co-ordination with Albania's OSCE Chairmanship, to the OSCE participating States on the COVID-19 pandemic. He urged that, "it is precisely when our global community is convulsed by a crisis of this magnitude that our obligation to combat the exploitation of vulnerable people becomes most acute". His full statement read:

"With the spread of COVID-19, the world faces an unprecedented threat to public health, which, in turn, poses extraordinary challenges to the economic and social cohesion of all our communities. In the fight against this common enemy, many governments have taken strong preventive measures, often combined with public interventions aimed at alleviating some of the economic losses that those measures inevitably create.

Although the COVID-19 threat is universal, the negative consequences of this crisis will be disproportionately carried by the most vulnerable in our societies. Firstly, victims of trafficking face exceptional danger as entrenched systems of exploitation are thrown into disarray and traffickers seek to maintain their revenue through greater violence or new forms of exploitation. Meanwhile, access to shelters and other support structures is increasingly limited at a time when need is at its greatest. Secondly, as resources gravitate to address public health concerns, attention is diverted from

detering criminal actors, and vulnerable persons already living in precarious circumstances are now at greater risk for being swept into exploitative situations.

The consequences of the current crisis on victims are far-reaching. Trafficking for sexual exploitation is increasingly moving online where traffickers can keep their revenue intact and enhance the isolation of and control over victims, particularly women and girls, who comprise 94% of the victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Children, at a time of school closures and potentially more hours spent online, face a greater risk of online grooming. Victims of forced labour find themselves with even fewer options for survival and less legal protection. In the case of trafficking for organ removal, one of the darkest and least addressed forms of trafficking, the impacts of COVID-19 are starting to raise alarm.

In moments of crisis, traffickers will increase their recruitment as more and more people find themselves in dire economic straits. For this reason, it is essential that governments ensure equal access to healthcare, unemployment services, and other welfare services, regardless of recent employment history or legal status, to guarantee that those who need this support the most can effectively access it. Anyone without an income or other form of support is at risk of falling into the hands of traffickers. In these chaotic times, it is vital that States do not let their guard down, but instead strengthen their anti-trafficking efforts.

Human trafficking feeds off vulnerability – in particular, gender and economic inequality – and it is a symptom of frailty in our society. It is precisely when our global

community is shaken by a crisis of this magnitude that our obligation to combat the exploitation of vulnerable people becomes most acute. Where trafficking goes unchecked and impunity reigns, the rule of law is undermined and the security and safety of all citizens, especially the most vulnerable, is threatened. For this reason, combating human trafficking is not just a law enforcement responsibility. It is a human, societal and security imperative, and an urgent priority.

The COVID-19 crisis will be remembered for generations, and we have just started to see its transformative impact on our lives. Today, as in all moments of historic change, we have the opportunity to steer our future in a better direction. Inclusive programmes ensuring protection to vulnerable groups can be a powerful tool to break the cycle of exploitation and strengthen exit pathways, giving a real alternative to those in need. With the necessary attention, adequate resources and the right programmes, we can start today to build a better and safer tomorrow for all.”

Bangladesh's child marriage problem is the world's human trafficking crisis

Why fixing the second issue isn't possible without addressing the first.

By Corinne Redfern

Foreign Policy (08.11.2019) – <https://bit.ly/36VwNxI> – First Papiya was forced into marriage at 12 years old. Then she was trafficked into sexual slavery.

Her story isn't unusual. It's echoed by tens of thousands of girls in Bangladesh, highlighting a link between child marriage and sex trafficking that should be impossible to ignore. The country with the highest rate of marriage involving girls under the age of 15 in the world, and where 150,000 to 200,000 children and young women have been trafficked into prostitution, the two forms of abuse are tightly intertwined. Traffickers prey on the vulnerable, and child marriage is what makes girls like Papiya vulnerable in the first place.

But international donors, policymakers, and even the U.S. State Department have failed to recognize this chain of exploitation, and that's slowing down efforts to address it.

Since March 2017, I have interviewed over 400 women trapped behind the walls of four brothels in Bangladesh, in an investigation that was funded by the nonprofit organization Girls Not Brides. Marriage is illegal for girls under the age of 18 (and boys under 21) in Bangladesh under the 1929 Child Marriage Restraint Act, although the law allows girls under 18 to marry under "special circumstances"—without establishing a minimum age limit, or clarifying what those circumstances must be. Half of the girls I spoke with told me that they had been married before the age of 18 and believed they had been

trafficked into sexual slavery as a direct result.

Yet for all the obvious overlap, trafficking and child marriage in Bangladesh are viewed independently of one another by the U.S. State Department –and initiatives to end both are kept separate as a result. While child marriage is largely approached by nonprofit organizations through a lens of legislative lobbying and education as prevention, counter-trafficking efforts center on rescue, rehabilitation, and prosecution. Projects that work to prevent trafficking focus on unmarried girls who are still in school.

Approximately 52 percent of girls in Bangladesh are lost in the chasm between child marriage prevention and trafficking rehabilitation: coerced into marriage as children and left without the support they need to protect themselves and safely break out.

Papiya was still trapped in a brothel in the village of Kandipara when I first met her in March 2017. She told me how she fled her in-laws' house barefoot in the middle of the night, leaving her sandals by the door so that the slap of their soles on the stairs didn't wake her 22-year-old husband. As the sun rose, she spotted a rickshaw driver sleeping by the side of the road and begged him for help. He agreed with a smile, she remembered. Then he drove Papiya to a brothel and sold her for more money than he'd usually make in a month.

Now 17, Papiya has been trapped in one of Bangladesh's 11 government-registered, legal brothel villages ever since. Each one enslaves up to 3,000 women and underage girls in sexual

servitude that can see them raped up to 11 or 12 times a day. Abdulla al-Mamun, the director of child protection and child rights governance at Service Civil International Bangladesh, says he receives reports of four or five children being trafficked to the country's largest brothel every month.

Reporting from inside these brothels never gets easier. As lines of men jostle through the entry gates and policemen patrol the brothel streets for signs of drugs or disorder, Papiya and her friends lie on their beds in windowless metal cells and self-harm in a last-ditch attempt at temporary escape.

None of the girls came here consensually. For some, it was their husbands who sold them to the brothels—each man opting to free himself from the constraining role of babysitter in a marriage in which his child wife might feasibly sleep with a teddy bear, and earning about 300,000 taka, \$3,500, in the process. But the majority of the girls shared the same story: like Papiya, they also refused to accept the life of sexual violence and abuse that they found themselves forced into in the name of marriage, and they were willing to risk their lives to escape it.

A few were picked up by traffickers as they attempted to make their way home. Others, like Rupa, Sony, Jinuk, crossed sunken rice fields and railway lines, only to find themselves rejected by their families for the social shame that accompanies a daughter who flees a life of exploitation. Within days, alone at a bus stop or a train station, each girl was approached by a man or woman proffering help and a place to stay for the night. They were drugged and sold to the brothel before they could understand what was going on.

Despite such widespread evidence of child marriage as a precursor to sex trafficking, the connection is consistently overlooked. The Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association has been working to provide legal assistance and shelter to abused women across Bangladesh since 1979, but staff say they have found themselves struggling to make international donors understand the crossover between underage marriage and modern-day slavery. Funding for their anti-trafficking work has increased since 2017, but little support comes for cases that involve domestic violence or girls who need to flee their marriage.

“It is hard to make our donors see that these problems are all linked,” said Towhida Khondker, the director of the lawyers association. “They are all forms of violence, and one can quickly lead to another.”

One agency with the influence to effect change is the U.S. State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Were they to take child marriage into consideration when assessing human trafficking in Bangladesh, local nonprofit organizations believe countertrafficking initiatives would likely be expanded to target the country’s most defenseless demographic: underage brides.

Since 2001, the United States has purported to hold foreign—often low- and middle-income—countries accountable for failing to adequately implement countertrafficking measures set out by the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act, as established in 2000. It does so through the means of the Trafficking In Persons (TIP) Report—a controversial but vastly

influential lengthy annual assessment of the response to trafficking in 187 countries, ranking them across four tiers: Tier 1 being the most successful at countertrafficking efforts, followed by Tier 2, Tier 2 Watch List, and finally Tier 3.

Countries considered not to be making sufficient efforts to combat trafficking are classified within Tier 3 and are subject to sanctions on U.S. aid to their governments, which are theoretically restricted to activities that are unrelated to human trafficking and its root causes. The U.S. State Department is then required by law to work with them to develop a more effective countertrafficking strategy going forward.

This year's report, released in June, saw 21 countries fall within Tier 3, including China, Belarus and South Sudan. For the third year in a row, Bangladesh was assigned Tier 2 Watch List status—a ranking explained in part by researchers as a repercussion of the sudden influx of over a million Rohingya refugees since 2016, and accompanied by 13 recommendations for improvement.

In 18 years of research and assessment, there has never been any mention of child marriage in Bangladesh's TIP profile. Yet the State Department is clearly aware of the implications that early marriage can have on a girl's safety: in this year's report, they referenced child marriage as a contributing factor to girls' vulnerability to sexual exploitation and trafficking in both Syria and Iraq.

Human rights advocates say that if the State Department viewed child marriage in Bangladesh as a form of trafficking or an enabler of trafficking, then it's possible that the country would have received different recommendations, or even a different grade. Were that the case, the incentives for the Bangladeshi government to end child marriage and develop comprehensive child protection legislation would be considerable.

"The Bangladeshi government takes the TIP report very seriously," said Liesbeth Zonneveld, the chief of Winrock International's Counter Trafficking-In-Persons Project, adding that both Bangladesh's secretary of home Affairs and foreign secretary have already shown a demonstrable commitment to implementing the State Department's 2019 recommendations. Zonneveld doesn't know why the United States refuses to consider child marriage as a form of trafficking and to include it in the TIP report accordingly. "The U.S. says there are 25 million global victims of human trafficking, whereas most of us would include forced marriage in that and say there are 40 million," she said.

Funding for programs that address child marriage as a root cause of trafficking would also be easier to access, said Talinay Strehl, the program manager for the Dutch anti-trafficking nonprofit Free a Girl. "Our donors respect the information included in the TIP Report," she said. "If we were able to show them that child marriage was referenced, it would probably be easier to get financial support for prevention projects that work with victims of child marriage." Free a Girl does not currently run any anti-trafficking projects that target girls forced into early marriage, but Strehl acknowledges that they're a high-risk demographic. "Right now, we just don't have the resources," she said.

Until the U.S. State Department acknowledges the role of child marriage in rates of trafficking in Bangladesh, and organizations on the ground are able to incorporate the victims of child marriage into their countertrafficking efforts, those working with trafficking survivors say girls growing up across Bangladesh will remain trapped at an alarming impasse: stay with your husband and endure sexual violence in the name of marriage, or run away and risk being sold into sexual slavery without hope of escape.

WORLD: Recorded increase in human trafficking, women and girls targeted

By Tharanga Yakupitiyage

IPS (09.01.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2D1vpNb> – Human trafficking is on the rise and it is more “horrific” than ever, a United Nations agency found.

In a new report examining patterns in human trafficking, the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that the global trend has increased steadily since 2010 around the world.

“Human trafficking has taken on horrific dimensions as armed

groups and terrorists use it to spread fear and gain victims to offer as incentives to recruit new fighters,” said UNODC’s Executive Director Yury Fedotov.

Asia and the Americas saw the largest increase in identified victims but the report notes that this may also reflect an improved capacity to identify and report data on trafficking.

Women and girls are especially vulnerable, making up 70 percent of detected victims worldwide. While they are mainly adult women, girls are increasingly targeted by traffickers.

According to the 2018 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, girls account for 23 percent of all trafficking victims, up from 21 percent in 2014 and 10 percent in 2004.

UNODC also highlighted that conflict has increased the vulnerability of such populations to trafficking as armed groups were found to use the practice to finance activities or increase troops.

Activist and U.N. Goodwill Ambassador Nadia Murad was among thousands of Yazidi women and girls who was abducted from her village and sold into sexual slavery by the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq, a tactic used in order to boost recruitment and reward soldiers.

Murad recently received the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize, dedicating it to survivors of sexual violence and genocide.

“Survivors deserve a safe and secure pathway home or safe passage elsewhere. We must support efforts to focus on humanity, and overcome political and cultural divisions. We must not only imagine a better future for women, children and persecuted minorities, we must work consistently to make it happen – prioritising humanity, not war,” she said.

“The fact remains that the only prize in the world that can restore our dignity is justice and the prosecution of criminals,” Murad added.

Sexual exploitation continues to be the main purpose for trafficking, account for almost 60 percent, while forced labor accounts for approximately 34 percent of all identified cases.

Three-quarters of all female victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation globally.

The report also found for the first time that the majority of trafficked victims are trafficked within their own countries of citizenship.

The share of identified domestic victims has more than doubled from 27 percent in 2010 to 58 percent in 2016.

This may be due to improved border controls at borders preventing cross-border trafficking as well as a greater

awareness of the different forms of trafficking, the report notes.

However, convictions have only recently started to grow and in many countries, conviction rates still remain worryingly low.

In Europe, conviction rates have dropped from 988 traffickers convicted in 2011 to 742 people in 2016.

During that same time period, the number of detected victims increased from 4,248 to 4,429.

There also continue to be gaps in knowledge and information, particularly in certain parts of Africa, Middle East, and East Asia which still lack sufficient capacity to record and share data on human trafficking.

“This report shows that we need to step up technical assistance and strengthen cooperation, to support all countries to protect victims and bring criminals to justice, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,” Fedotov said at the report’s launch.

Adopted in 2015, the landmark SDGs include ambitious targets including the SDG target 16.2 which calls on member states to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children.

SDG indicator 16.2.2 asks member states to measure the number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population and disaggregated by sex, age, and form of exploitation, reflecting the importance of improving data recording, collection, and dissemination.

“The international community needs to...stop human trafficking in conflict situations and in all our societies where this terrible crime continues to operate in the shadows,” Fedotov said.

“I urge the international community to heed Nadia [Murad]’s call for justice,” he added.

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WORLD: Human trafficking – hidden in plain sight

Human trafficking destroys lives, robs people of their dignity and basic human rights as it causes unfathomable misery to the immediate victims, their families and their communities.

By Roman Hawatt*

IPS (21.12.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2TviLvx> – The media globally tends to have a bias to negative, sensational and headline grabbing stories and events and this certainly applies to reporting related to human trafficking in the third world. With the abundance of stories around sweat shops, massage parlours and organ trafficking networks happening ‘somewhere else’, the West is generally desensitised, lacks empathy and fails to fully appreciate the scale of the problem which sits right under their noses and in plain sight.

It is a fact that for a variety of reasons, this insidious trade tends to be more hidden away in the West whilst it is generally conducted more openly in developing countries.

“Human trafficking is a global problem, but it’s a local one too,” U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in 2018 when the U.S. State Department released its 2018 Trafficking in Persons report, which assesses countries around the world

based on how their governments work to prevent and respond to trafficking. "Human trafficking can be found in a favourite restaurant, a hotel, downtown, a farm, or in their neighbour's home."

Estimates vary depending on the agency reporting and also depends on specific categorisations. The International Labour Organization for example, estimates 21 million people are affected by forced labour whereas other reputable agencies estimate up to 48 million men, women and children are enslaved and trafficked around the world today.

According to the International Labour Organization, 68 percent are exploited in industry sectors like agriculture, mining, construction and domestic work creating profits of \$150 billion annually.

There is therefore a gigantic financial motive for the maintaining and the growing of this illicit trade which sadly 'has always been the way of the world'. The ideal of unalienable rights and universal liberty is actually still a relatively new concept in the history of time.

The proposition is diabolically simple in that some human beings will take advantage of and exploit other vulnerable categories of human beings unless there is a strong disincentive and a massive change in the contributing circumstances.

Whatever the cause and whatever the thinking, modern day

slavery and human and human organ trafficking is now far more prevalent in the developed world than either the public knows about or was previously thought. Sadder is the fact that even with the best intent matched with state of the art resources, even the best law enforcement agencies do not appear to be able to keep up with the growing size and scale of the problem.

Even in the U.K., which after all gave the world the Magna Carta in the 13th century, a turning point in establishing human rights and arguably the most significant early influence on the extensive historical process that led to the rule of constitutional law today in the English-speaking world, the numbers of people trafficked is estimated to number in the tens of thousands of victims, according to the National Crime Agency (NCA).

These victims in the UK are predominantly from places like Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa, with a roughly equal balance between men and women in other than the sex industry in which women and girls make up the vast majority of those exploited.

There are also trafficked people of all genders working in more prosaic roles like car washes, construction, agriculture and food processing. They receive very little pay and are forced to put up with poor living conditions.

As a result, the NCA says, it is increasingly likely that someone going about their normal daily life in the U.K., engaging in the legitimate economy and accessing goods and services, will come across a victim who has been exploited in

one of those sectors but may never recognise them unless they are educated to the signs.

General indicators of human trafficking or modern slavery tend to be harder to spot in the developed world but can include signs of physical or psychological abuse, fear of authorities, no ID documents, poor living conditions and working long hours for little or no pay.

A 2018 report by the Global Slavery Index estimated that some 403,000 people are trapped in modern slavery in the U.S. – seven times higher than previous figures. In the UK, that figure is estimated at 136,000, nearly 12 times higher than earlier estimates. Andrew Forrest, founder of the Global Slavery Index, called the report “a huge wakeup call.” The report includes forced marriages, noting that women and girls make up 71 percent of people trapped in modern-day slavery today.

The pernicious persistence of modern day slavery is one of the reasons it is addressed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 and these build off of many of the accomplishments achieved with the original Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but which did not address human rights, slavery or human trafficking and were often criticized for being too narrow.

In particular, Sustainable Development Goal 8 of the 17 SDGs is the goal to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, whilst Goal 8.7 specifically addresses modern day slavery

and human trafficking. It is worth noting that SDG 8.7 is also supported by two other SDG goals. SDG 5 for example aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, while SDG 16 seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

“Because modern-day slavery is a global tragedy, combating it requires international action,” said President Barack Obama, who in 2011 issued a Presidential Proclamation designating each January to be National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month. “As we work to dismantle trafficking networks and help survivors rebuild their lives, we must also address the underlying forces that push so many into bondage. We must develop economies that create legitimate jobs [and] build a global sense of justice that says no child should ever be exploited.”

While progress has been made in addressing broader employment issues in some developed nations, such improvements remain overshadowed by the continuing scourge of human slaves being used in the supply chain at both a local and international level.

Whatever the future holds, what is constant is that human trafficking destroys lives, robs people of their dignity and basic human rights as it causes unfathomable misery to the immediate victims, their families and their communities.

Under the circumstances, there must be a seismic shift in

awareness and a willingness to act no matter who you are or what community you live in. It is incumbent upon all of us to exercise a higher level diligence and situational awareness aimed at winning the freedom of anyone that is exploited and abused.

With individuals, educators, charity institutions, business and Government each taking incremental steps we can win.

Remember, to save one life is a step towards saving the whole of humanity.

**The author, Romy Hawatt is a Founding Member of the Global Sustainability Network (GSN) pursuing the United Nations Sustainability Goal number 8 with a special emphasis on Goal 8.7 which 'takes immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms'.*

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