

Your Excellencies and Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I join you today on this forum in Tallinn. The regional cooperation between the Nordic countries and our neighbours are of great importance. And today we will see how we can use this collaboration for inspiring each other in combating trafficking in human beings.

Today's forum is a knowledge forum

We call this a forum, but it is in fact a knowledge forum. And how does that work? Simply by bringing professionals together, so you can discuss and exchange ideas. It is all about the daily protection of victims and the fight against trafficking in human beings.

Prominent guests

We have prominent guests with us today. I am very pleased that the honourable EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator Ms Myria Vassiliadou joins us today providing an overview of the EU-initiatives for combating trafficking in human beings.

As well we have the honour to have Estonian Minister of Internal Affairs Hanno Pevkur and from Nordic side the Ambassador of Norway Lise Kleven-Grevstad with us. I am also happy that today's forum will be followed by tomorrow's trilateral forum of the Baltic Assembly, the Nordic Council and the Benelux Parliament. A forum that will also address the work done to deal with this serious problem.

Human trafficking is a violation of human rights

Trafficking in human beings is a grave violation of human rights. It is a use of vulnerable people for profit making that infringe upon everything we believe in. Every year thousands of people – women, men, girls, and boys – are trafficked for different kinds of exploitation. For prostitution, forced labour, begging, and crime.

We see new forms of trafficking evolving that demands new responses. And we see human trafficking on a global scale as we see it in the Baltic Sea Region. Trafficking in human beings is truly a global problem we all have to deal with – for the sake of the victims involved.

Trafficking demands response on the national level

Combatting human trafficking demands a solid response on the national level. Today at this knowledge forum we will see outstanding examples of how this is done in the countries in the Baltic Sea Region and also with an example from the UK. The examples will show the complexity of this work comprising victim identification, criminal proceedings, prevention of recruitment and victim support.

In every country this work requires concerted actions between many stakeholders. The police, prosecutors, border guards, social services and NGO's all have important roles to play.

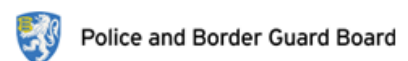
And trafficking demands international collaboration

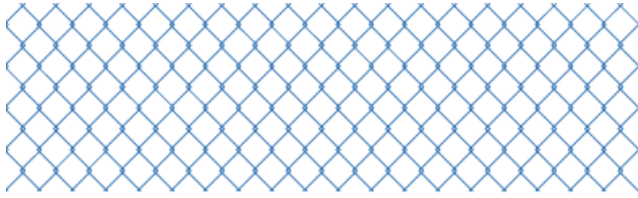
But trafficking in human beings is in its nature a criminal activity that transcends national borders. Therefore dealing with it also demands collaboration on an international and regional

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level. On the European level the EU measures for fighting human trafficking have played a decisive role. And in our own region The Council of Baltic Sea States has contributed to the work with numeral activities.

The NCM regional cooperation

The Nordic Council of Ministers also contributes to this common, regional effort to combat human trafficking. The Nordic countries have a long tradition for regional collaboration. Within the Nordic countries. And within the larger Baltic Region, especially with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and North-West Russia.

Building a platform for regional cooperation

A key priority in this work has been the making of a solid platform for the regional collaboration. We do this by building networks between stakeholders criss-crossing boundaries in the region. And the networks we built are extensive. As an example, The office of Nordic Council of Ministers in Tallinn contributed alone in 2013 to more than 3.000 face-to-face encounters between people working in the Nordic countries and people working in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Fighting trafficking building networks and capacity building

The fight against human trafficking has been a priority of this collaboration since the beginning of this millennium. The main objectives of the efforts of the Nordic Council of Ministers have been building capacity and building networks between authorities and NGO's in the region.

In the combating of human trafficking these networks' effects are twofold: They facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices between the parties. In this way the networks make us cleverer. Secondly, the networks are letting specialists in different countries know each. This makes collaboration easier. In this way the networks make us faster and more effective in our actions.

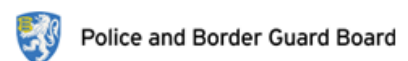
We want to facilitate that it is easy for a police officer in Vilnius to call a colleague in Oslo. Because networking makes it easier to verify the victims and the traffickers, exchange information, and investigate cross-border cases.

This forum is part of a new NCM project

The forum today is part of a wider border- regional cooperation project on trafficking in human beings initiated by the Nordic Council of Ministers. In 2014 and 2015 we bring together experts daily working with human trafficking. This and three upcoming forums as well as study visits will be the means for facilitating dialogue and exchanging knowledge. The project is a response to wished raised forward by police and border guard authorities in the involved countries.

The NCM's programme for combating trafficking

This project follows the Nordic Council of Ministers' programme for stronger measures to combat trafficking which was initiated in 2011. This programme has set focus on emergent forms of human trafficking for forced labour and exploitation of children in the Baltic Sea Region. The programme has also united police officers, prosecutors, judges, border guards, social authorities and NGO's for training forums and forums.

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Trafficking is still a problem – what to do

Much has been done by countries, NGO's, and international organisations in combating human trafficking. But we do not see the number of persons trafficked declining. What are we to do then?

Much of the answer lies of course in the measures on the national level, undertaken by the states.

On the regional level we can contribute by continuing smoothing cooperation and by sharing of knowledge and best practice. I believe it to be important that we – countries and organisations working in the Baltic Sea Region – join forces in our work. At look for effective tools in this work and how to implement them.

This way we can help each other finding and implementing effective solutions. And we can facilitate effective collaboration between people working with the trafficking on daily bases. All this contributing to a better support of victims and more effective investigation of offenders.

Today we will strengthen ourselves in combating trafficking

Almost a year ago, in May 2013, a forum took place here in Tallinn, also addressing human trafficking. The forum was closing with round-table discussions. The groups were asked to give proposals for better identification of victims and for more effective activities to combat human trafficking. Among the proposals were:

- "Better cooperation between local police, border guards and NGO's".
- "More working together between countries".
- "Joint Nordic-Baltic-Russian meetings to exchange experiences on combating human trafficking".

These proposals are exactly what we will be carrying out today. I believe that when we meet today we make an important contribution for strengthening our work on combating trafficking in human beings in our region. Our ambition is clear – and let me say it directly: Do away with slavery.

Thank you for your attention!

*An opening speechy by **Dagfinn Høybråten**, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers at the [Knowledge Forum I: "Trafficking in Human Beings – Recruitment, Identification, Victim Support"](#) in Tallinn on 24 April 2014*

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