

KNOWLEDGE FORUM II

# TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

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Opening Words at the Knowledge Forum II: Trafficking in Human Beings – Social Consequences,  
Riga, 27-28 November 2014

Jan Widberg, Director, Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Latvia

Chair,  
Dear Participants,

It is a great honour to be given the opportunity to address such a skilled and dedicated audience. Yet, given the topics of the Forum and the realities they represent, one could of course wish that a meeting like this should not be needed. But here we are: Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) is a vicious, persistent and border-crossing crime. Fighting THB therefore requires equally firm, persistent and coordinated efforts, backed by sufficient and sustained resources.

A solid national competence base is the fundament for the fight against THB, whereas international cooperation at all levels and between sectors is indispensable for its success. A lot is indeed being done in the region.

The states have gradually built capabilities to deal with THB, for instance in the judicial, police and social sectors. The CBSS Task Force on THB plays an important role in regional governmental cooperation against THB. The BSPC has operated a parliamentary Working Group to muster political support and recommendations for the fight against THB. NGOs are doing commendable efforts to deal with THB and its consequences.

This multitude is good news. It is a testimony to a broad commitment of good forces mobilizing against THB. It is also a display of a wide arsenal of resources to fight this crime. However, the multitude also entails a necessity to further improve the exchange and cooperation between actors. It is important to avoid duplication and gaps, and to strengthen the comparative advantages and combined impact of their actions.

The Nordic Council of Ministers and its partners in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and North-West Russia have been forerunners in a number of initiatives on THB in the region over the past years. These initiatives have had two overarching objectives:

Firstly, to promote knowledge building by supporting the exchange of knowledge and best practices between experts from different sectors and different countries.

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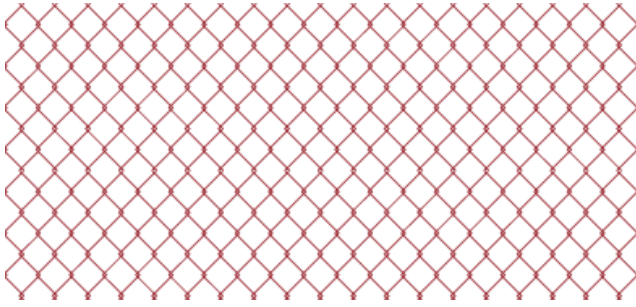


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Secondly, to contribute to facilitating regional cooperation by strengthening networks between the experts, specialists, and practitioners in the region who are dealing with THB in their everyday work.

The programme that was launched in 2011 by the Ministers of Nordic Co-operation was concluded in 2014. The programme contributed substantially to the strengthening of regional cooperation between the Nordic countries, the Baltic States, and North-West Russia. As a follow-on to the programme, a series of four expert meetings will be arranged in 2014 and 2015. This, the second Knowledge Forum, is a link in that chain, which will be completed in spring 2015.

At the Nordic Council Session in October 2014, Nordic Parliamentarians and Ministers alike expressed a strong will to pursue the efforts to fight THB. So what we have on the drawing board now is a draft multi-sectorial three-year programme to address current and emerging challenges in dealing with THB in the region. The specific structure and content is not yet decided. One objective is to involve and coordinate several sectors in the development and implementation of the programme: Legislative affairs, labour market, and health and social welfare sectors.

The new programme, like its predecessor, aims at bringing together experts from different sectors from the Nordic countries, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and North-West Russia. The programme will place great weight on enhancing cooperation and coordination with other stakeholders – for instance by exploring the potentials and possibilities to launch joint initiatives with the CBSS. In the coming months, the relevant political bodies of the Nordic Council of Ministers will pursue deliberations over the structure and substance of the new programme on THB.

We at the offices in the Baltic States and in St Petersburg, with our local partners, will of course contribute to the programme with our local knowledge and networks.

In conclusion, this means that the Nordic Council of Ministers will continue to provide political support and substantive resources to the fight against THB. Thus, the output of this Forum will serve as an important input to the preparation of a new programme on THB.

I wish you all success in your work here in Riga.

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