

**Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Dear Experts and Friends,**

The Nordic Council of Ministers aims to combat all forms of human trafficking. In the Nordic countries, we have a long tradition of cooperation – in fact, one of the oldest in the world. We have found strength in sharing experiences and learning from one another. This is also true in the fight against human trafficking.

Due to our experience in almost all sectors, we believe in networking. Strong, coordinated cooperation across borders is fundamental.

The Nordic Council of Ministers is therefore actively working to strengthen cooperation in the Nordic region, and particularly with our neighbours – the three Baltic States and north-west Russia.

Every year, millions of people are trafficked globally, and it does not appear that the numbers are getting smaller.

The Nordic region is no exception. The Nordic countries act as receiving and/or transit countries. The majority is trafficking in women, but we are hearing more and more about new forms of trafficking, such as forced labour, forced begging, organ harvesting – and the list goes on.

I am therefore particularly pleased to open this conference, which will discuss the identification of victims and criminal offenders and in particular the question as to why it is so difficult to identify victims. The conference brings together Baltic, Russian and Nordic experts to discuss common challenges and why it is important to put these issues on the agenda. I bid you all a warm welcome.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Illegal immigrants are in the worst situation. They often have to accept low-paying jobs under poor working conditions. They are willing to take chances and are therefore at risk of ending up as victims of trafficking.

Social dumping is on the international agenda. It might seem obvious that migration, poor working conditions, exploitation and trafficking would be closely related, but it's not that simple.

We need to understand more, and to build up competence. But we also have to ask ourselves how prepared we are to give these people, who have been cheated and exploited, new hope and the same rights and protection as others – rights and protection they are entitled to.

We believe that it is only through better coordination and transboundary knowledge-sharing that we can combat cross-border crime and the cynical exploitation of people in need.

The Council of Ministers laid the groundwork for regional cooperation with a joint Nordic-Baltic information campaign back in 2001. This cooperation has now been consolidated – and we will continue to build on it.

I would also like to highlight the Knowledge-Building and Networking Programme and the Mobility Programme as useful instruments in facilitating close and fruitful cooperation with our neighbours in the east.

**Partner:**



**Police and Border Guard Board**

Since 2009, when the first project was completed, these programmes have put the focus on human trafficking and police cooperation, and it has now expanded to include border guards.

The programme has enabled people from the Baltic States, the Nordic countries and north-west Russia who work to combat trafficking on a daily basis to participate in joint study tours to learn how their neighbours are fighting human trafficking.

These tours have created a network for participants, making it possible to share their experiences and establish personal contacts.

After the first study tour in 2009, Iceland received its first case when a Lithuanian woman on a flight to Reykjavik revealed that she was a victim of trafficking. While investigating the case, the Icelandic police officer who attended the study tour was able to use the Lithuanian contacts he'd made – which meant that the case was able to be brought to court within a much shorter period of time.

During this conference we will hear from Norway's Jarle Bjørke and Estonia's Andres Väliste on the importance of networking.

I would also like to thank the Nordic-Baltic Network of Policewomen, or the NBNP, especially Veronika Isberg, which has overseen these projects. The network has also managed to build a bridge between these two projects, and thus passed on its experience to the participating experts.

For the Nordic Council of Ministers and Ministers for Cooperation combating human trafficking is a priority area, so it's gratifying that the Council of Ministers, through these projects, has contributed to the creation of this collaboration platform through concrete action.

We're also working more closely with international organisations – particularly the Northern Dimension Partnership and the CBSS – to improve coordination and avoid duplication.

There are no easy solutions in the fight against human trafficking.

I've talked a lot about cooperation between countries, but we're constantly faced with new challenges, and these also require us to work with other partners – once we've not necessarily worked with before.

Cooperation between authorities, international organisations, trade unions, the private sector and NGOs is essential.

In fact, we will only solve the problem if we all contribute and take our responsibilities seriously. We all have our role to play in the prevention of trafficking, supporting victims and prosecuting the perpetrators. It's also important to remember that human trafficking takes place because there's a demand for it – especially in prosperous countries, including the Nordic region.

So saying, I wish you all a rewarding and informative conference!

**Berth Sundström**, Director of the Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Estonia

**Partner:**



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