Opinion No. 3/2009 of the Group of Experts on Trafficking in Human Beings set up by the European Commission

On the Anti Trafficking Day

16 June 2009

Recalling the development on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings at EU-level over the past ten years, including legal instruments, programme activities, the 2005 EU Plan of Action on Trafficking in Human Beings, the Brussels Declaration, the Recommendations contained in the Report of the 1st Expert Group on Trafficking in Human Beings of the European Commission, and the report of the Commission of 16 October 2008 on the 2005 Plan of Action presented in connection with the second Anti Trafficking Day (ATD);

Against that background, welcoming the initiative of the European Commission to further develop EU anti trafficking policy by establishing an ATD on the on the 18 October every year, first held in 2007 in co-operation with the Portuguese Presidency, and followed by a second ATD in 2008 organised by the French Presidency in co-operation with the European Commission and CARITAS;

Welcoming the intention of the incoming Swedish Presidency to organise a third ATD in Brussels with a conference on 19-20 October 2009, under the title “Towards Global EU action against Trafficking in Human Beings”, giving priority to the EU external dimension of co-operation;

The Group of Experts on Trafficking in Human Beings issues the following opinion to stress the importance of the ATD.

OPINION

1. The Group of Experts on Trafficking in Human Beings (the Group) believes that the ATD is an important event to raise awareness at EU-level as well as at national level on trafficking in human beings. Furthermore, the ATD is an occasion that contributes to the strengthening of EU co-operation to curb human trafficking.

2. The third ATD is an opportune moment for the Commission and the Member States, and in particular the Presidency of the EU, to reinforce and augment the ATD and to ensure a continuum for the future.

3. Further on the ATD for 2009 the Expert Group suggests the following priorities for ATD 2009 in terms of a public message:

"Trafficking in persons concerns us all, don't stay indifferent"

Our rationale for this overall message is that trafficking affects everyone, and every person can influence the market for trafficking as consumers of goods and/or services produced by trafficked persons. The message needs to address all citizens throughout the EU.

We believe that addressing the wider audience, as opposed to only the groups directly affected or endangered by trafficking, could lead to a considerable change in favour of anti trafficking efforts.

Other suggestions for slogans and messages are:

"Do YOU profit from exploitation?"

"Not all forced labour happens far from home"

"Trafficking in human beings affects us all, don't turn your back on it"

The EU external dimension of co-operation:

- Identify the main regions of origin of persons trafficked into the EU and raise awareness through the organisation of conferences, workshops, and other events, with the local authorities in these regions.

- Consider the status of trafficked persons who are EU citizens in other EU countries or third countries, and organize an activity to highlight the considerable differences in the support towards such trafficked persons.

- There is still a lack of active co-operation among the law enforcement authorities and international organisations working in the field of criminal justice. Steps to enhance the cooperation should be taken, in order to increase the level of criminals being brought to justice.

4. Further considerations for future action around the ATD:

- It is important that each ATD reflects the changing situation and the current stage of development of the trafficking phenomenon and acknowledges and promotes new, effective, strategies to tackle it.

- Trafficking for labour exploitation has become a very urgent matter to be addressed in a broader way, including its root causes and consequences.

- The ATD should be used as an opportunity to reinforce European parliamentary debate on the issue. NGOs and National Rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms should be invited to contribute to debates at the European Parliament.

- The issue also needs to remain high on the agenda of the Council of Ministers, not only in the field of Justice and Home Affairs, but also include the ministries of social affairs and employment, external relations and development, equal opportunities and gender or health.

- Member states and third states should be encouraged to participate in and contribute to the ATD agenda, for example, in the promotion of national action plans and in prevention and awareness raising campaigns.