

**Report on the conference "Trafficking in Women for
the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation"**

Nicosia, Hilton Hotel, 13 October 2008

Within the framework of European Anti-Trafficking Day, on the 13 October 2008 the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS), in partnership with the European Parliament Office in Cyprus, hosted a conference entitled "Trafficking in Women for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation". The conference was funded by the National Machinery for Women's Rights, the Ministry of Interior and the European Commission's Education and Culture DG "Europe for Citizen's Programme".

The conference was opened by Susana Pavlou, Director of the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies [MIGS], and Alexandra Attalides, Press Attaché for the European Parliament Office in Cyprus.

In her opening speech, Ms Pavlou stated that demand for sexual services has been widely recognized on a European and international level as a root cause of trafficking in women. She pointed out that trafficking in women for sexual exploitation is inextricably linked to unequal gender norms and must be understood within the context of gender inequality and traditional power relations between women and men both in the public and the private spheres.

Ms Attalides stated that the European Parliament recognizes trafficking in women as a form of violence against women and ranks it the fastest-growing criminal activity in the EU. She pointed out that the European Parliament recognizes the lack of clear political commitment to address and eradicate trafficking in women, including the lack of concrete legislative measures. She also noted that all member states should have zero tolerance towards all forms of violence against women and called for the adoption of gender mainstreaming in all policies in Cyprus. Ms Attalides stated that the inclusion of gender mainstreaming in anti-trafficking policies is a necessary step to bringing national policies in accordance with European legislation.

Session I: "Trafficking in Women for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation: Cyprus and EU Policies"

The first session was opened by Mr Neoklis Sylikiotis, Minister of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus. Mr Sylikiotis began his presentation by referring to the global scale of the phenomenon of trafficking stating that, according to UNICEF, there are approximately one million children trafficked annually worldwide and, according to the US Government, 800.000 people are trafficked annually of which 80% are women and girls. Mr Sylikiotis also focused on recent measures to combat trafficking in human beings implemented in Cyprus. These measures include:

- Preparation of a National Action Plan on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Exploitation of Children.
- The newly adopted legislation from 13 July 2007 which is harmonised with the European *acquis communautaire* and according to International Conventions.
- Cyprus has signed and ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

In his presentation, Mr Sylikiotis also focused on two new policy developments that have taken place in Cyprus in the context of trafficking in women. Firstly, a multidisciplinary group on trafficking in human beings has been formed as foreseen by the Cypriot legislation on trafficking in persons and, secondly, the special "artiste" visas for women third-country nationals to work in night clubs and cabarets have been abolished.

The aims of the recently formed multidisciplinary group on trafficking in human beings include the monitoring and evaluating of the implementation of the national referral system, the development of manuals and educational resources on good practices, as well as the organization of seminars and awareness raising campaigns. The group is comprised of all relevant ministries and departments, as well as two NGOs. With regard to the "artiste" visas for which the Cyprus Government has been strongly criticized, the Minister stated that women under this specific status are at a higher risk of falling victim to trafficking for the purpose of

sexual exploitation. For this reason, the Ministry of Interior has called for the abolition of the “artiste” visa as well as the adoption of new procedures with regard to the issuing of the visas of employment to third country nationals to work in specific night clubs and cabarets. Mr Sylikiotis’ proposal has been approved by the three -member Ministerial Committee [Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance and the Ministry of Justice and Public Order] and came into force as from 1st November 2008.

Mr Sylikiotis’ speech was followed by the presentation of Ms Therese Murphy, member of the Executive Committee of the European Women’s Lobby (EWL) - the largest umbrella organisation of women’s associations in the European Union working on a wide range of gender issues, including trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation and prostitution.

Ms Murphy gave an overview of EWL’s main activities and projects, including the establishment of the European Observatory on Violence against Women. Ms Murphy emphasized the position of EWL on trafficking in women and prostitution, defining these as forms of violence against women and recognizing their interrelation with the global sex industry. She also stressed the importance of addressing the issue of trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation from different perspectives. These include the revision and evaluation of migration policies and procedures, the inclusion of gender mainstreaming in all government policies, addressing the issue of gender inequality as a root cause of trafficking in women, as well as addressing the important aspect of demand for sexual services as a factor which leads to the increase of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. She further explained that the decriminalization of women in prostitution and the penalizing of clients/buyers of sexual services are effective ways to combat trafficking and prostitution.

Reflecting on European policies on trafficking in human beings and prostitution, Ms Murphy noted some important reasons for the failure to effectively combat trafficking in women. These include the lack of a gender perspective in policies and measures, disagreement over the definition of trafficking, lack of political will to address trafficking in women for sexual exploitation specifically preferring to take a more general approach, and reluctance to address demand for sexual services as a contributing factor. Ms Murphy gave examples of effective policies followed in

countries of the Nordic Baltic region with regard to the harmonization of legislation on sex buying. ¹

Session II: "Gender (In)equality and Demand for Sexual Services"

The second session was opened by Dr Maddy Coy, Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University. In her presentation entitled "Men's Accounts of Paying for Sex: A UK Study"², Dr Coy explained that, according to her research, there are four elements of demand in trafficking a) men who buy sexual services b) pimps and traffickers c) the states that are destination countries d) socio-cultural normalisation. She also pointed out that awareness raising measures must focus on the responsibility of those who buy women in prostitution, and their strategic role in the chain of trafficking. Dr Coy presented the main points of the scholarly assessment of the characteristics and motivations of men who buy women in prostitution, emphasizing their strategic role in the chain of trafficking and how they act as a driving force generating demand for trafficking in women. She also demonstrated the harmful effects of socio-cultural perceptions and stereotypes of the role of women and men in society, including "men's sexual drive/need" discourse, which normalize prostitution and trafficking and removes the social and legal responsibilities from the men buying sex.

Rita Superman, Head of Office for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of the Cyprus Police brought to light the appalling reality of two victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in Cyprus, by presenting their testimonies as given to the Cyprus Police. She described the plights of one woman arriving from Morocco and the other from Uzbekistan. By revealing the testimonies of brutal violation of their human rights, including rape, physical and psychological abuse and debt bondage, Ms Superman stressed the importance of raising public awareness of the reality of the abuse and violence experienced by trafficking victims. She also illustrated the common deception and threat techniques used by traffickers in the chain of recruitment and sexual exploitation of women trafficked to Cyprus, which is a country of destination for female victims from Latin America, Africa, Philippines, Russia and other eastern European countries.

¹ For more information please see <http://www.nordicbaltic-assistwomen.net/> and <http://www.womenlobby.org>

² For more information please see www.cwasu.org

Finally, Ms Mine Yucel, Director of the Prologue Consulting Ltd, presented her research report on women trafficking in the Turkish-Cypriot community. In her speech she brought attention to such important factors as the interrelation of trafficking and prostitution and other forms of organized crime. Ms Yucel presented the situation of trafficking in women in the Turkish Cypriot community and explained in detail the procedure that currently takes place in the north as well as the attitudes of traffickers and owners of clubs and bars that recruit these women.

The conference was concluded with the screening of the documentary "Not for Sale" produced by the European Women's Lobby and the Coalition against Trafficking in Women. The DVD was filmed by Marie Vermeiren and produced by the joint CATW-EWL project on the prevention of trafficking. This compelling DVD features five survivors of prostitution, as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking, Ministers of the European Parliament and representatives from CATW and EWL. Speakers discuss prostitution as violence against women, the links between prostitution and trafficking, and arguments against State decriminalization and legalization of prostitution, as well as the demand for prostitution that promotes trafficking in women.

The online documentary is available at:

http://www.womenlobby.org/site/video_en.asp.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The aim of the conference was to address the issue of trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation with special focus on the demand for sexual services and gender equality. The conference provided a forum for discussion between NGOs, the Government of Cyprus and other international and research organizations such as the European Women's Lobby and the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University.

It is clear that the Cyprus Government has yet to make any effort toward addressing the issue of demand for sexual services or how gender [in]equality is inextricably linked to trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. The conference

demonstrated the need to identify these two factors as root causes of trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation in Cyprus. MIGS welcomes the efforts of the Cyprus government with regards to its recent efforts in combating trafficking, including the abolition of the special "artiste" visas. However, it maintains that these recent new measures are not sufficient in combating the phenomenon of trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation. To this aim, a more concerted effort by all relevant stake-holders must be adopted with additional measures that take into account the gender dimension of trafficking in women and the role of demand for sexual services.

Studies in other European countries such as the one presented by Dr Maddy Coy of CWASU, have demonstrated that demand for sexual services sustains and promotes trafficking in women for sexual exploitation and prostitution, recognizing both as forms of violence against women. Ms Therese Murphy correctly argued that if the state does not adopt a holistic approach to combating the phenomenon of trafficking including the revision of migration policies, the inclusion of gender mainstreaming in all anti-trafficking policies and practices, and the criminalization of demand for sexual services, current efforts will fail to produce the desired results.

As a result of the conference the following recommendations were made:

- A collective effort (civil society and the state) must be made to incorporate a gender perspective and address the issue of demand for sexual services into the Cyprus National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons and the legislative framework. This should be done after conducting extensive research and analysis of best practices followed in other countries. In relation to this, MIGS is in the process of conducting a research study to examine demand for sexual services as a contributing factor to trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual services. This report will be available in September 2009.
- Systematic information and dissemination to raise awareness on the phenomenon of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation.
- Systematic research, particularly with respect to demand for sexual services.
- Systematic workshops and seminars, to all relevant stakeholders, on all subjects related to trafficking in women, but most importantly on gender



issues, so that trainees understand how gender inequality relates to trafficking and why trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation primarily affects women.

We hope that the above mentioned proposals and recommendations will be taken seriously into consideration by the relevant authorities. We also hope that this fruitful dialogue between civil society and the state will continue.

To see MIGS recent awareness campaign on "Trafficking in Women for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation" please visit <http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/?p=1174>

To see MIGS research report "Mapping the Realities of Trafficking in Women for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation" please see <http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/?p=322>

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