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Statement

by Ambassador Gerhard Pfanzelter  
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at the General Assembly Thematic Debate  
on Human Trafficking

Panel 2: Cross-border cooperation in protecting victims of  
trafficking in persons and prosecuting their traffickers

New York  
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Mr. Chairperson,

We thank you for convening today's thematic debate on human trafficking.

In our global efforts to fight human trafficking Austria is strongly committed to a human rights based approach and the integration of a human rights perspective in the further development and implementation of policies addressing human trafficking. For that reason, Austria was **one of the first countries to ratify the European Convention against Human Trafficking**.

In our project to fight human trafficking we are pursuing a **dual track approach**, taking initiatives both on the national and international level.

**Austria has set up a National Action Plan** against Human Trafficking and a **National Task Force** bringing together representatives from the Ministries of Interior, Justice and Foreign Affairs with NGOs working in the protection and assistance of trafficking victims. In the near future Austria will nominate a **“National Coordinator against Human Trafficking”**.

As regards the **international track**, we have taken concrete steps to support **regional cooperation particularly in the Western Balkans**:

- We are supporting regional women's networks both in their efforts to raise awareness among women at risk about the dangers of human trafficking and in their cooperation with local police, justice and social institutions;
- We help to train and sensitise police forces in the region in their fight against human trafficking;

In this regard I would also like to underline that Austria supports the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime** the main actor in the field of crime prevention, which assists states in the fight against organised crime and initiated the **UN Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking UN.GIFT in February 2008 in Vienna**.

As regards the fight against human trafficking, we particularly see the need for increased action in the following areas:

### **Identification of victims**

In order to protect and assist trafficking victims, their identification is crucial. National authorities are often insufficiently aware of the problem of human trafficking and victims frequently have their passports or identity documents taken away from them or destroyed by the traffickers. In such cases they are treated as illegal immigrants, prostitutes or illegal workers and at risk of being punished or returned to their countries without receiving any help.

**For that reason, Austria considers it of utmost importance to take further steps in order to raise the awareness for this crime among the relevant authorities and institutions.** These measures should include the training of officials in the countries of origin, transit and destination on the local, national and international level.

### **The assistance to victims**

Another related problem is the assistance offered to victims of trafficking. Victims breaking free of their traffickers' control generally find themselves in a position of great insecurity and vulnerability. **We should therefore develop more target-group-oriented concepts, especially when it comes to the assistance of children.** At the OSCE-Conference on child-trafficking which took place last week in Vienna it was highlighted that in most of the states child protection services need to be improved, in particular at the local level.

In Austria we have developed a successful system of providing assistance to the victims of human trafficking: this assistance is provided in cooperation with non-governmental organisations engaged in victim assistance. Assistance is not conditional upon a victim's agreement to cooperate with competent authorities in investigations and criminal proceedings.

The Austrian NGO LEFÖ-IBF "Intervention Centre for Victims of Trafficking in Women" in 2007 assisted 170 female migrant victims who came to Austria by means of trafficking and who are living there under conditions of gross exploitation.

In 2003 the city of Vienna realised the need to create a special shelter for children and for this purpose established "Die Drehscheibe" – a centre for victims of child trafficking and unaccompanied minor foreigners. The aim was not only to take care of these children but also to cooperate with their countries of origin such as Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Hungary, Georgia and China to find long-term solutions. Social workers from Vienna hold training courses for the staff in the countries of origin, and Vienna also supports the construction of "crisis centres". These long-term measures of the "Drehscheibe" provide children with the possibility of a safe return to their home countries.

### **Reliable Data on human trafficking**

We have to realize that human trafficking still remains underreported. This is mainly due to the lack of reliable data and information. This unreliability of data can to a certain extent justify inappropriate action on the side of state authorities and also harm better regional international and cross-border cooperation. **For that reason, it would be important that states increase their efforts in providing reliable data on human trafficking.**

Currently, Austria together with other EU-MS and IOM (International Organization for Migration) is running an international project aimed at developing guidelines for the collection of data on trafficking in human beings, including comparable indicators.

Finally, I would like to raise a question which seems to be important in this context.

**Question:** After a decade of efforts taken by all relevant actors to fight human trafficking, it is still the third largest source of profit for international organized crime, after drugs and arms trafficking, with revenues amounting to 32 Billion dollars a year. **Where do you see improvement in the area of evaluation and monitoring of human trafficking?**