

# Are you supporting human trafficking?

Human trafficking is often associated with women who, through coercion or promises of work, are sold across national borders and forced to prostitute themselves. This is not a distorted picture, but the victims of human trafficking – or slavery as it should perhaps more tellingly be called – not only find themselves in unsavoury surroundings that are far removed from the lives of ordinary people. They also include women, men and children who function as slaves in our private homes – as cleaning ladies, labourers and gardeners. They are exploited in the restaurants where we eat and the hotels where we sleep. They are sold as factory workers and agricultural labourers, as beggars and illegal adoptees or as organ donors.

## People can be sold again and again

There is a simple reason for this. On the one hand there is a demand for cheap labour and sexual services, and on the other hand there are people with poor living conditions and no or little hope for the future. This market is exploited by criminals who lure or coerce their victims into slavery. They take advantage of people who have little or no opportunities to provide for themselves and their family. This is something that goes on not only in poor, remote countries. It happens also here within our own region. People are sold on an equal footing with drugs and weapons but unlike drug and weapons, where profit can only be made once, victims of trafficking can be sold again and again. And this is the brutal perspective that makes human trafficking such an extremely lucrative business with a very high profit margin. At the same time, there is little risk of the people responsible being caught and punished, which is why human trafficking is one of the most rapidly-growing types of criminality, not only in the Baltic region and Europe, but also in a global context.

## A local and an international problem

International organisations have released estimates which indicate that there are approximately 2.5 million people who are victims of human trafficking worldwide. But it is difficult to provide a precise picture of the extent of human trafficking. This is partly because it is a question of organised criminality which, in the nature of the case, is covert, and partly because there is no systematic and comparable collection of data.

Just as the victims of human trafficking not only end up far removed from ordinary people's everyday lives, trafficking is not only something that involves crossing borders where people are exported. People are also sold within the borders of our countries. The problem is thus local and international and must therefore be placed high on the political agenda at both levels. It is not enough to leave the problem to international organisations. Human trafficking is very much a local problem. We must fight the factors that make people vulnerable and we have to make sure that victims find the necessary support to regain control over their lives. We all have to help fighting it by making sure that we are not contributing to the exploitation in one way or the other. We must demand that we are not serviced by victims of trafficking in hotels and restaurants, and we must make sure that the food we are buying is not produced by victims. In other words, we all need to be better at identifying the victims of trafficking and act accordingly.

## Agreement across borders and parties

Human trafficking was a focal point at the 2009 annual Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. The working group that was set up at the conference has since drawn up a list of political recommendations designed to combat human trafficking. The grave

nature of the subject has made it possible for the working group to reach agreement on these recommendations across countries, regions and political parties. When the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference met in the Åland Islands 29–31 August it resulted in a resolution with recommendations addressed to the governments of the Baltic Sea States and the EU Member States. The working group has forwarded six recommendations in connection with this potential resolution.

- All countries are called on to subscribe to all relevant international conventions, treaties and decisions and adapt their national legislation in order to criminalise all aspects of human trafficking.
- The countries must recognise that human trafficking is international criminality that requires international cooperation to combat. At the same time victims are exploited locally so it must also be combated locally.
- Countries must earmark adequate, permanent, goal-oriented funds and resources for the public authorities, NGOs, international organisations and projects such as the Baltic Sea States Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings.
- Countries must strive to develop and coordinate data collection on human trafficking in order to heighten understanding of the problem, to develop appropriate measures against human trafficking, support research and legal proceedings and provide victims of human trafficking with the best possible support.
- Countries must strive to ensure that the focus is always on victims. Human trafficking is exploitation irrespective of where it is practiced and which form it takes. Human rights must constitute the core of these measures.

- The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) comprises members from national and regional parliaments in the Baltic Sea States.
- A decision was made at the 2009 conference to set up a working group comprising politicians from parliaments which, across national borders, regions and political parties, would come up with joint political recommendations designed to combat human trafficking.
- The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference held its annual conference in the Åland Islands 29–31 August. In this connection a resolution which will help to combat human trafficking, among other things, was adopted. The working group has submitted six recommendations to the governments of the Baltic Sea States and EU Member States.

- Countries must strive at operational level to develop efficient methods and models to ensure that the relevant national players and NGOs help victims and their relations and to increase the number of convictions of the criminals and exploiters behind human trafficking.

Human trafficking is an issue that concerns us all, irrespective of where we come from and which political beliefs we have. We have a duty to act as private individuals and at political level. We must demand that the exploitation of women, men and children who have been sold into slavery is not part of our daily lives. We have

shown in the working group that it really is possible to set out common goals across the political spectrum. It is now up to the governments of the Baltic Sea States and EU Member States to commit themselves to the attainment of these common goals.



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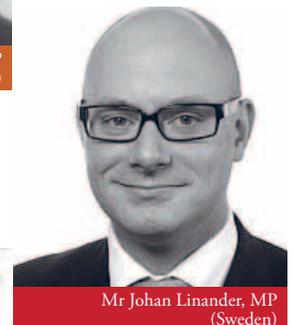
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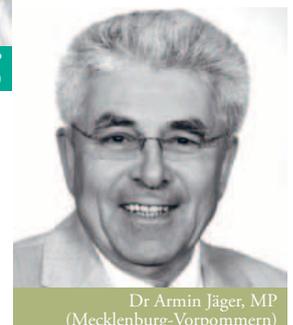
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