

Global World's Seedy Side Trafficking in Humans and Drugs Is Booming

NEW YORK, APRIL 29, 2006 (Zenit.org).- The seamier side of an increasingly globalized world was highlighted in two recent reports, one dealing with trafficking in human persons and the other with the international drugs trade. Virtually no country is immune from human trafficking, warned Antonio Maria Costa, executive director of the U.N. Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC). Costa's remarks came during the launch on Monday of the report "Trafficking in Persons: Global Patterns." The study identifies 127 countries of origin, 98 transit countries and 137 destination countries, involved in human trafficking. It also revealed that attempts to combat trafficking are being hampered by a lack of accurate data, in part because some countries fail to acknowledge that the problem affects them. "It is extremely difficult to establish how many victims there are worldwide as the level of reporting varies considerably, but the number certainly runs into millions," noted Costa in a press release Monday. "The fact that this form of slavery still exists in the 21st century shames us all."

Victims

Trafficking for sexual exploitation is the type of abuse reported more frequently. Sexual exploitation is particularly notable in Central and South Eastern Europe. The plight of victims of forced labor has received less attention and, UNODC noted, their identification has been even less successful than in the case of sexual exploitation. Forty-one countries in Central and South Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and Asia are the most frequently mentioned as countries of origin for human trafficking. Central and South Eastern Europe and Western Europe are reportedly the leading regions for the transit of these victims. Other key regions of transit are Southeast Asia, Central America and Western Africa. Ten countries score very high as reported destinations for trafficked victims. Five of these are in Western Europe: Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands. The others are Israel, Turkey, Japan, Thailand and the United States. The groups involved in trafficking can be divided into two main types. The first type have a strong hierarchical structure and discipline. In addition to human trafficking, they are heavily involved in the transnational trafficking of various goods, including drugs and firearms, the smuggling of migrants, and kidnapping. The second type has as its primary activity human trafficking, and consists of a limited number of individuals forming a relatively tight and structured core group, surrounded by a loose network of associates. This type seems to be strictly profit-oriented and opportunistic, shifting between illegal activities on the basis of where the most profits can be generated. Dealing with these groups requires identification of traffickers in order to be able to investigate trafficking and prosecute offenders. The report said that relatively few cases are prosecuted successfully, resulting in few convictions.

Recommendations

Among the report's recommendations is the need to reduce demand, whether this be for cheap goods made in sweatshops, or for services provided by sex slaves. Allied to this is the need to undertake information campaigns to reduce the vulnerability of people to trafficking. Another big challenge, noted UNODC, is to target the criminals who profit

from the vulnerability of people trying to escape from poverty, unemployment and oppression, and to increase the level of criminal convictions. The report also called on governments to protect trafficking victims, particularly women and children. Adequate assistance is often lacking, and rescued victims often are re-trafficked because legislators and enforcement officials, despite good intentions, sometimes produce or have to implement flawed laws that can put these same victims back into the clutches of their exploiters.

Narcotics trade

On March 1 the International Narcotics Control Board released its annual report for 2005. In an accompanying message, the INCB's president, Hamid Ghodse, commented that past efforts at controlling drug trafficking were based on a model that presumed a simplistic relationship between the supply of drugs and demand for them. "Today," he said, "it has become apparent that the problems of international drug control are among the most complex facing the world today and that they are not amenable to superficial measures." As an example, Ghodse noted that attempts at crop substitution have demonstrated that it is much more complex than initially anticipated to halt the cultivation of plants from which illicit drugs are extracted. Such programs can only be successful if they are economically viable. Moreover, the changeover to alternatives must be combined with law enforcement and drug prevention activities in a long-term process. The report itself explains that providing alternatives to drug cultivation has been implemented in many countries -- Afghanistan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Thailand, Bolivia, Colombia and Peru. Most have experienced declines in illicit drug crop cultivation, partly to alternative development efforts and partly to other factors. In 2004, the total area under opium poppy cultivation in all countries except Afghanistan amounted to only 32% of the total in 1994; and only 43% of the total area under coca bush cultivation in 1995 remained under such cultivation in 2003. In relation to the complexity of the issues involved, the report notes the links between drug abuse, deprivation, unemployment and criminal behavior. "None of them, individually or collectively, cause drug abuse any more than drug abuse is the sole cause of crime, poverty and unemployment," the INCB argued. What often occurs is that these conditions and behaviors often coexist and reinforce each other. In such an environment the criminal lifestyle that accompanies drug abuse may be much easier and more attractive than legitimate activities. Thus, part of the fight against the drug trade requires sustained and comprehensive efforts to tackle social deprivation and to develop legitimate alternative occupations and lifestyles.

Regional developments

Part of the report details the drug situation in each region. In Africa the main illicit drug is marijuana, or cannabis. It is used by more than 34 million people there. Marijuana plants are smuggled within the region and beyond, mainly into Europe and North America. Drug traffickers are also increasingly using Western African countries along the Gulf of Guinea for smuggling cocaine from Latin America into Europe and, to a lesser extent, into North America. Moreover, two recent seizures of cocaine in Kenya may indicate that cocaine traffickers have also begun using Eastern Africa as a transit area. Central America and the Caribbean continue to be a major transshipment point for consignments of drugs, mainly cocaine, originating in South America and destined for the

United States and Europe. In the North American region comprising Mexico, the United States and Canada, the INCB observed that cooperation has led to significant progress in dealing with drug trafficking. But many problems remain, among them the growing abuse of prescription drugs. As well, Mexico is no longer only a transit country. It has also become a consumer country for illicit drugs and even a producer country for drugs such as marijuana, heroin and amphetamine-type stimulants. In South America, the level of illicit coca bush cultivation remained significantly lower in 2004 than in the peak year of 2000, but it did increase by 3% compared with 2003. In Asia, progress was made in reducing opium production in Laos and Myanmar. But Afghanistan continues to be the main producer of illicit opium poppy, accounting for 87% of global production in 2005. Globalization's gloomy side won't fade soon.

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