



Children as Victims of Human Trafficking – How to Protect Their Rights

Seminar on

Trafficking with a Special Focus on Children

Casina Pio IV, Vatican City, 27 April 2015

HM Queen Silvia of Sweden

Eminences,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

Let me first of all say how pleased I am to be here, invited by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. It is especially nice to be in the historic Casina Pio IV, in the midst of the splendid Vatican Gardens, on a beautiful spring day like today.

We are gathered to discuss one of His Holiness' priorities and one of the major challenges to our society, how to combat human trafficking. In particular, how to safeguard the rights of child victims of trafficking.

In his message on The World Day of Peace His Holiness said:

"We ought to recognize that we are facing a global phenomenon which exceeds the competence of any community or country. In order to eliminate it, we need a mobilization comparable in size to that of the phenomenon itself."

We all need to make our contributions to these efforts.

When I founded World Childhood Foundation 16 years ago, it was with a strong feeling that I really wanted to do something for the most vulnerable children around the world. I shall confess that I, at the time, did not know exactly how my contribution would take form, what challenges it would entail, or how difficult it would be. I, as many others, thought that it would be fairly non-controversial to side with the most vulnerable children. I thought that to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation would be something everyone would want to subscribe to. I was wrong.

My first challenge had to do with child pornography. Today it seems quite obvious that no one should have the right sell or to download Child pornographic material to their private computer. But in the early years of Childhood this was not so obvious. There were many protests in Sweden where people were of the opinion that a law that would prohibit possession of child pornography would also go against freedom of speech and would boarder on state censorship. In the debate that followed I was absolutely astonished that it was so easy to put adult's rights before that of the child. Especially as this so clearly involved children who were exposed to the worst form of exploitation.

And unfortunately this is not uncommon. Time and again we are given proof of how young children, and sometimes babies, are being used for sexual purposes. Be it child pornography or trafficking. And still - we are discussing children's rights. They should not have to be discussed – they should be clear and absolute. They should be indisputable.

Last year, the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child celebrated 25 years. A convention that has been signed by all countries in the world, except for two. It is safe to say that the whole world agrees to the principles of basic human rights for children. And yet, we are still fighting. Fighting for the right of children to not be beaten, fighting for the right of children to be listened to, fighting for the right of children to receive equal education, regardless of gender. And most of all, fighting for the right of children to not be treated as possessions and commodities and protect them from child labour. We are still fighting. And today, more than quarter of a century later, we are discussing how to protect the rights of children who have been sold into

sexual slavery and exploitation. I would have wished that this would not need to be discussed at all, but rather something of the past.

But reality is seldom what we wish for. It is estimated that some 1.2 million children are subject to commercial sex trade globally, but the numbers may be higher. It is estimated that approximately 21 million people are subject to trafficking each year and although this is not only for sexual purposes, we can assume that many of these are children 18 years of age and under. Some even suggest that 50% of that number consists of children. We shall of course see to the rights of all these people, but we must first and foremost make sure that the children, who are our responsibility, are being protected.

So how can this be done? First of all we must make sure that we break the vicious circle. While aiding and protecting the children who are already victims, we must simultaneously put many times more effort into ensuring that children are never being trafficked at all. That they simply are not viewed as a commodity. We have to make sure that children are never put on the market.

Today, 16 years after I founded World Childhood Foundation, this is where I see that Childhood can make the most difference: Through preventative work; through targeting groups where we know that children are at the most risk of being abused and exploited; through making sure that each and every child is given a loving, nurturing and happy Childhood. So we have to start from the very beginning. For every resource spent on assisting victims, we need to invest tenfold in preventative work. We need to make sure that children are protected from the moment they are born, and we need to make sure that the adults around them are given the necessary tools and equipment to care and protect their children. We, who are here today, need to make sure that our voices are heard, because it is through us that the children can speak and be heard.

A very wise man once said: "The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people, but the silence over that by the good people."

On The World Day of Peace in 2015 His Holiness expressed the similar thought that: "The globalization of indifference, which today burdens the lives of so many of our brothers and sisters, requires all of us to forge a new worldwide solidarity and fraternity capable of giving them new hope and helping them to advance with courage amid the problems of our time and the new horizons which they disclose and which God places in our hands."

Let's not be silent!

Let's give our voices to the most vulnerable children!

Let's work together for a new worldwide solidarity and fraternity!

I thank you for your attention!