



## **The European Network Against Trafficking in Women for sexual exploitation**

*European Union, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2007  
European Year of Equal Opportunities for all*

Every year we highlight the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, the international Women's Day, and a lot of politicians give public speeches about gender equality - that's good. But a year consists of 364 more days, and also during these days it's very important that we all continue to do something concrete to develop real gender equality.

A key issue in the work for gender equality on a European level is to combat trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation. If we want to be successful in this work we must focus on the causes behind this cynical and terrifying phenomenon.

All markets depend on customers for their operation. Without men who regard it as their self-assumed right to buy other people's bodies and use them for their own pleasure, prostitution would not exist. The sexual exploitation of women, girls and boys would cease.

We cannot discuss trafficking in women, sex slavery involving women and children without mentioning prostitution. Nor can we talk about prostitution without reference to trafficking in women. We can never combat trafficking effectively unless we take a vigorous stand against prostitution and other situations that make women vulnerable to conditions of violence, exploitation and denial of human rights.

We must therefore remind us all of the underlying causes of trafficking in women and prostitution. These are:

- patriarchal society,
- poverty stemming from the inequitable distribution of resources between women and men,
- other social and economic disparities between women and men,
- 'feminisation' of poverty,
- rape, sexual exploitation, incest and violence.

But in Europe of today we can see that the members of the European Union have chosen different ways to handle the situation with international trafficking in women and its close connection to prostitution.

In Sweden, a law forbidding the purchasing of sexual services has been in force for eight years now. An offence under the act is punishable by fines or a maximum of six months' imprisonment. Since its introduction, the incidence of street prostitution has fallen sharply. The act has also made it possible for the police to take action against brothels and other markets. Swedish law, considering prostitution not only as an aspect of male violence against women but also a significant social problem, criminalise the customer – usually a man – not the prostitute.

Some other European countries have legalised prostitution, or plan to do so. In our view, this is tantamount to giving up and bowing to pressure from the international sex industry. We are convinced that these countries will not be able to deal effectively with international trafficking in sex slaves, particularly as most prostitutes in these countries are themselves the products of human trafficking.

Trafficking in women is a crime against human rights; as such it demands that we take action.

Trafficking in women and prostitution is an issue requiring a broad perspective and a will to act in a range of policy areas. Not only must we take into account the legal, social and migration policy aspects of the trade, but the issue of the so-called customers, i.e. men, must be brought into focus.

Another much needed initiative is the introduction of preventive measures including poverty reduction and social programmes. Clearly none of the women or children exploited in the sex slave trade and prostitutes have chosen this occupation voluntarily.

Therefore our organisations agreed on establishing ENATW - European Network Against Trafficking in Women for sexual exploitation. Considering the different backgrounds of EU member States and of women's organisations and starting from the common interest in mainstreaming gender equality, the purpose of the ENATW is to strengthen the European Union and its members work against trafficking in women and children.

For further information on ENATW, please visit our website [www.aretusa.net](http://www.aretusa.net)

IRENE – Initiatives Researches Experiences for a New Europe, *Italy*

MONA Foundation for the Women of Hungary, *Hungary*

Associazione Formazione Professionale del Patronato San Vincenzo, *Italy*

Research Centre of Women's Affairs, *Greece*

L'Amicale du Nid, *France*

Women's Issues Information Centre, *Lithuania*

BalticFem, *Sweden*

Dom Zakonny Zgromadzenia Siostr Urszulanek Niepokalej Maryi Panny z Gandino, *Poland*