

Press Release

Launch of awareness raising campaign in relation to trafficking in human beings

The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr. Dermot Ahern T.D., together with Mr. Fachtna Murphy, Commissioner of An Garda Síochána today launched an awareness raising campaign in relation to trafficking in human beings. The campaign has a threefold purpose

- to raise awareness of the problem of human trafficking with the public and relevant public sector personnel
- to appeal to the public and public sector personnel to report any suspicions anonymously to the Gardaí either through Crimestoppers at 1800 25 00 25 or via a dedicated email address called blueblindfold@garda.ie
- to discourage the demand for the services of victims of sexual and labour exploitation.

The campaign is based on the ‘blue blindfold’ concept, initially developed by the UK, which has as its message ‘Don’t close your eyes’ to Human Trafficking. The blindfold represents the risk of people having their eyes closed and being unaware of the crime that may be going on around them.

Speaking at the joint launch Minister Ahern said **“Trafficking in human beings is a form of modern day slavery which has no place in our, or indeed in any, society. Ireland is committed, with our international partners, to taking a strong approach to combating trafficking in human beings”**.

The Minister emphasized the seriousness of the offences created in the Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 – operational since 7 June 2008 **“Trafficking in human beings for labour, sexual exploitation or removal of organs are among the most serious offences that can be committed against the person and this is reflected in the maximum penalty of life imprisonment which can be imposed on conviction”**.

The Minister urged the public and the authorities of the need to be vigilant and aware that the trafficking of people for labour or sexual exploitation may be taking place in any of our communities. He encouraged them to report any suspicions to An Garda Síochána at 1800 25 00 25 or via a dedicated e-mail address - blueblindfold@garda.ie

21 October 2008

Note for Editors

European G6 initiative against trafficking in human beings

The G6 initiative is a coordinated international campaign of activity to tackle the trafficking of human beings. Ireland, UK, The Netherlands, Poland, Italy and Spain are participating in

the initiative which is being supported by Europol, Interpol and Eurojust. The initiative is a multi-strand operation marrying strategic policy development with a period of operational enforcement activity. The strands of the initiative are intelligence-gathering, awareness raising, law enforcement activity and victim protection. The awareness raising strand of this initiative is led by Ireland. Each of the countries participating in the initiative is running or has run awareness raising campaigns this year.

“Blue blindfold” awareness raising campaign

The campaign in each country is using the concept of a blue blindfold initially, developed by the UK, encouraging people not to close their eyes to human trafficking. The website www.blueblindfold.gov.ie can be accessed to get more information on the indicators of human trafficking, contact details for members of the public to report suspicions or any information which can then be investigated, details of victim supports etc. The key elements of the campaign include newspaper and internet advertisements, posters, strip line and column advertisements on public transport, a hotline number (1800 25 00 25) and an e-mail address – blueblindfold@garda.ie where members of the public can report suspicions of trafficking anonymously.

Key measures being taken by the Government to tackle the sordid crime of human trafficking include

1. Legislative Developments:

(a) Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008

This Act is fully operational since 7 June, 2008. The Act creates offences of trafficking in adults or children for the purpose of their sexual or labour exploitation or the removal of their organs. It also makes it an offence to sell or offer for sale or to purchase or offer to purchase any person for any purpose. Penalties of up to life imprisonment apply in respect of these offences. It is also an offence, punishable on indictment by a fine or a term of imprisonment of up to 5 years, to solicit or importune a trafficked person for the purpose of prostitution.

(b) Arrangements for recovery and reflection period and temporary residency

Section 124 of The Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, provides for a period of recovery and reflection of 45 days in the State for alleged victims of trafficking and also, in circumstances where the person trafficked wishes to assist the Gardaí in any investigation or prosecution in relation to the alleged trafficking, a further six months period of residence, renewable, to enable him or her to do so. An administrative framework, broadly reflecting the provisions in the Bill, was introduced on 7 June to provide for the period of recovery, reflection and residency in the State during the period between the full enactment of the provisions of the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill.

2. Administrative Arrangements:

An Anti-Human Trafficking Unit was established in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in February, 2008 under the stewardship of an Executive Director. The Unit is working to ensure that the State’s response to trafficking in human beings is co-ordinated and comprehensive. It is working, in conjunction with national and international stakeholders, to

facilitate the implementation of a new national strategy to prevent and tackle trafficking in human beings.

A **High Level Group on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings** was established earlier this year. The Group is tasked with presenting to the Minister the most appropriate and effective response to dealing with trafficking in human beings. The Group, co-chaired by the Director General of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service and the Assistant Secretary in the Department dealing with, amongst other issues, crime. This high level group includes representatives of An Garda Síochána and other key Departments and Offices who have a contribution to make to the national response.

National Action Plan to Prevent and Tackle Trafficking in Human Beings – Work is underway on the drafting of this Plan under the direction of the Interdepartmental High Level Group to tackle Human Trafficking. The Plan will deal with prevention and awareness raising, prosecution of traffickers and the protection of victims with a particular focus on child trafficking.

Engagement with the NGO community

The Anti-Human Trafficking Unit is engaging constructively with the NGO community, who have an important part to play, particularly in relation to follow-up service provision to victims of human trafficking. The Unit is engaged with over 30 stakeholders nationally comprising of NGOs, representatives of the High Level Group and other Government Departments/Offices in roundtable discussions and five inter-disciplinary Working Groups dealing with –

- Development of a National Referral Mechanism
- Awareness Raising and Training
- Child Trafficking
- Labour Exploitation Issues
- Sexual Exploitation Issues.

Training

A continuous professional development training course has been designed by An Garda Síochána, (assisted by the International Organisation for Migration, with participation from non-Governmental organisations and the UK Human Trafficking Centre) dealing specifically with the issue of trafficking in human beings. By the end of this year this training will be delivered to 250 members of An Garda Síochána, including those employed as immigration officers and those assigned to local detective units throughout the State, together with a further 300 probationers. The training programme is designed to provide the necessary skills to identify victims of trafficking and provide a range of specialist investigative techniques.

Since July 2008 basic level training to identify the indicators of trafficking has been provided by the International Organisation for Migration (again with participation from NGOs) to over 100 personnel in various public sector agencies. These include the National Rights Employment Authority Inspectors, Private Security Authority, HSE staff and staff of the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Further training is planned for other Governmental stakeholders.

Media Contact Details:

Press Office
Dept. of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

01-6028328