

# Promoting Gender Equality to Combat Trafficking in Women and Children



ASEM Seminar co-organized by  
the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden, and UNIFEM in co-operation with UNESCAP  
7-9 October 2002



REGERINGSKANSLIET



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**Promoting Gender Equality to Combat Trafficking in Women and Children,**  
ASEM seminar co-organized by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden  
and UNIFEM in co-operation with UNESCAP, 7-9 October 2002

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Cover photo: Nick Rain

The women in the cover photo are from a remote village in North Borneo, Indonesia. They represent one of the many groups of women and children vulnerable to trafficking. Living in economic hardship, with little education and few alternatives, they are easy targets for traffickers. While these women themselves have not been trafficked, many women from their village have.

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## Messages

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**T**rafficking in human beings is a serious problem all over the world, in Asia as well as in Europe. Women and children, girls and boys, are recruited, marketed, transported and sold by traffickers to be exploited in prostitution, forced labour and for other purposes - from rural to urban areas, from poorer to wealthier regions, within and across countries. In order to find lasting solutions we have to be aware of the root causes of trafficking.

The unequal balance of power between men and women, reflected in gender inequality and patriarchal attitudes, paves the way for trafficking by leaving women and girls powerless and in subservient roles. Lack of awareness and respect for the human rights of women and children make them vulnerable to exploitation. Trafficking illustrates not only discrimination but also the worst form of gender inequalities.

Thus, it is important and necessary to focus on trafficking in persons from a gender and rights-based approach. By promoting gender equality and human rights, we can combat trafficking, poverty and underdevelopment.

The ASEM seminar on Promoting Gender Equality to Combat Trafficking in Women and Children, held in Bangkok, 7-9 October 2002, brought together experts, policymakers and practitioners, along with representatives from ASEM governments, the UN, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the research community. It provided an excellent opportunity to identify and formulate how to prevent human trafficking by developing and strengthening measures directed at promoting gender equality.



*Noeleen Heyzer*  
*Executive Director, UNIFEM*

## **Combating Trafficking in Women and Children: A Challenge for Globalization**

**I**n our global world, migration has become a fact of life for people in all regions. Women as well as men are increasingly on the move, unable to find livelihoods in the communities where they were born or drawn by the promise of new opportunities and a better life elsewhere. But the opportunities and the promise are not the same for everyone. Globalization has opened up two very different labour markets – one for those with the education and skills demanded by new technologies, and one for those willing to take the low-skilled and low paid jobs people in high-growth areas do not want. The terms of employment are also very different – involving not only wages and working conditions but also their status in the host country – as legal immigrants with job protection and benefits, or as illegals, with neither rights nor protection. It is in this second global labour market that trafficking, including trafficking in human beings, has grown and flourished.

Human trafficking is expanding across borders and continents, becoming a big business as well as a major international human rights concern. Trafficking in human beings affects vulnerable individuals, particularly women and children, in every region of the world. Its purposes include not only prostitution and sex slavery, but also multiple forms of forced labour and services, such as slavery and debt peonage. While gains have been made in terms of international frameworks and national plans of action to promote and protect women's human rights, trafficking continues to grow, fueled by the engines of poverty, discrimination and gender inequality.

The trafficking of women and children must be viewed in the broader context of labour migration and the movement of people as refugees from situations of conflict. This report clearly sets out this context, and locates it in a gender and human rights framework. It sets out the major human rights agreements that deal with the problem of trafficking, including Security Council resolution 1325 on women peace and security, and the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, adopted in 2000. These build on commitments to human rights and gender

equality made at the world conferences of the 1990s and through the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, now ratified by 177 countries.

Nevertheless, these agreements leave important questions unanswered: How can developing countries eliminate the kind of poverty, discrimination and hardship that leaves women and children vulnerable to trafficking? What must be done to ensure international protection for workers of all kinds – and eliminate the conditions that allow trafficking to thrive?

This publication, a product of the conference on “Promoting Gender Equality to Combat Trafficking in Women and Girls” endeavors to address these concerns. In addition to background papers, it includes presentations, discussions and recommendations for action among governments, national and international NGOs, bilateral donors, UN partners and the private sector – from 25 countries in Asia and Europe. Their productive exchange identifies the root causes of the problem and points out ways on how to tackle them. Most importantly it shows that there is hope that through our joint efforts trafficking in women and children can be stopped.