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|  | **UNMIK/FR/007/01 FEATURE RELEASE –**  **19 January, 2001**  Human Rights **The Fight Against Female Trafficking: Focus on Prizren**  007The fight against female trafficking by international organizations in Kosovo, notably UNMIK CIVPOL and KFOR is expanding, branching out from Pristina to the Prizren region. It all began last October when UNMIK CIVPOL established a Trafficking and Prostitution Investigation Unit (TPIU) in Pristina, soon followed by one in each region, albeit shortstaffed and as yet ill-equipped. But such shortcomings have been compensated by a gritty determination to combat what is tantamount to slavery.  To date while the unit's police have visited the "coffee bars" both in and out of uniform to assess the situation, 4 bars that were particularly "flagrant," have been raided, while several other assaults are planned in the near future. The Specialized Police Unit, a Polish force, whose teams are professionals dealing in entries, spearheads the raids. After securing the premises the UNMIK police intrude to arrest pimps and rescue the women. If a woman wants to be repatriated, she is referred to the International Committee for Migration (IOM) and OSCE. In mid-October the Motel Palma, located in a village near Prizren, was a target. The German KFOR task force patrolling the area had informed the TPIU. According to a TPIU police officer, Prizren: "They made it a point to visit the bar. Two women approached them saying they wanted to go home. The IOM  helped with their repatriation. During the raid we found several others. We removed them from the premises.  Four women are still working there, and are now registered with the unit."  Prosecuting the pimps has been daunting: the 3 young Albanians and a Moldavian female were running the Motel Palma (3 rooms upstairs were earmarked for "business"). But after CIVPOL gave the case for prosecution, the bar opened again in a matter of days.  In November the Bosfor bar in Prizren was raided following a tip from a female that had escaped from there. She had reported that  her sister and several other females were confined against their will and wanted to escape. "We raided the bar, 1 or 2 females were repatriated through IOM, 5 to 6 opted to stay," says a TPIU police officer. (According to an OSCE human rights official, this is because economic conditions in their home countries are so dire.) The bar was closed for the duration of the trial when the male owners were being prosecuted, but it soon reopened under a new owner and new name as CIVPOL has no legal means of forcing its closure.  007_1According to an OSCE Gender Adviser for Human Rights: "Everyone is too scared to prosecute the pimps. Judges and prosecutors receive threats and if women testify they remain traumatized as they have been beaten and sexually assaulted."  In mid-November a third raid occurred - on the Mobile Shop Bar: 2 Kosovar Albanian brothers were accused of forcing women into prostitution and of confiscating their passports.  "One brother was out selling 2 women and returned in the middle of the raid. He had sold them for DM 2,500-3,000 to another outfit in the Prizren area," recalls a TPIU police officer.  There are about a dozen to 20 bar-nightclubs in Prizren, and about 20-30 "coffee-bars" ("almost kiosks" according to a police officer) all around the bus station. According to this officer, trafficked women typically end up in bus station "cafes."  The fight against trafficking unleashed by UNMIK CIVPOL and KFOR since last October illustrates the extent to which intervention from outside can effectively assail this slavery.  Certainly another year will be needed to see how effective the fight against trafficking has been. According to an OSCE Gender Adviser for Human Rights hope lies in the new UNMIK "Regulation on the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons in Kosovo" which  was signed on 13 January 2001.  According to its provisions trafficking is a criminal offense and anyone who attempts to engage in it is liable to imprisonment between 2-12 years. Anyone who organizes a group of people for the purpose of trafficking can be imprisoned  for between 5 to 20 years. Video and electronic data would be admissible in court. During any investigation a court could take "appropriate measures" to protect the witnesses.  If a person is charged with prostitution in Kosovo or with illegal entry, the regulation will give the trafficked victims a defense against conviction for illegal entry and/or prostitution. A person accused of prostitution cannot be deported on that basis (i.e. if they were trafficked). The regulation overrides any provisions in the applicable law that are inconsistent with it.  According to the latest IOM Pristina Counter-Trafficking Unit Situation report, entitled "A Profile of Women Trafficked into Kosovo" - based on cases from February to November 2000: "All documented cases indicated that women and girls are trafficked into Kosovo for sexual exploitation." The manners of recruitment vary and include kidnapping, deception and coercion.  The report concludes: "Traffickers and criminal elements are the main protagonists recruiting young women from Moldavia, Ukraine, Albania and Bulgaria for forced prostitution, and various forms of abuse, including control of personal documents and passports, physical and psychological coercion."  Up to 15 November 2000 100 women trafficked into Kosovo from Eastern European and CIS countries for prostitution were assisted by the IOM Return and Reintegration project which helps trafficked victims return home, as well as providing pre-departure counselling and monitoring upon their return.  Since September 2000 IOM has registered a considerable increase in referred cases, especially from Prizren, Peja, and the Pristina region. This could be due to a rise in the number of victims voluntary seeking assistance and to social contact with KFOR or the police, and to a rise in police activity and a better coordinated response.  The victims are largely from urban suburbs or rural areas -- 64% were Moldavian, 15% Romanian, 10% Bulgarian, 9% Ukrainian and 1% from Russia (average age 23). Almost half were single mothers.  Sixty nine percent of the victims were rescued during police raids on bars and nightclubs, or on brothels. An increasing number of victims managed to escape and seek help.  According to IOM statistics many of the women helped were never paid for their services. Other disturbing facts: the women were usually sold 3-6 times during their journey to Kosovo. Most were beaten and raped shortly after leaving their home countries. Seventy-nine per cent reported to be sexually abused by traffickers or traffickers' friends. Their estimated value in Kosovo was DM 1500-2500. Almost half had no freedom of women in Kosovo. According to the victims, most of clientele are ethnic Albanians.  A more proactive approach is being adopted: since last August a series of OSCE-initiated roundtables on trafficking have been held - with UNMIK's Office for Gender Affairs, IOM, the Regional TPIU, Special Police Unit and UNHCR as participants  - to debate a strategy and to take up initiatives to improve responses to these incidents. They adopted common procedures for reacting to cases. For example, if the police find the girls they refer them to OSCE (OSCE undertake the initial interviews before handing them over to the IOM). An agreement with the Detention Centre, valid up to 31 December 2000, allowed the sheltering of women for short periods in the Prizren facilities for their protection and as they might be needed as witnesses against pimps undergoing prosecution. (DELETE:allows OSCE to shelter the women in the Prizren Centre as they are needed to serve as witnesses against pimps undergoing prosecution.) But currently an international NGO is raising money to build a safehouse, which is expected to open in early 2001. The roundtable also led to the drafting of the letter being distributed to different coffee bars informing trafficked women of their rights and telling them to go to the police station if they need help.  According to an anonymous source, organized crime is largely responsible for trafficking the women as "moving them across borders is no simple thing. The criminal groups have links with the customs and local police at various border crossings along the way. Trafficking involves payoffs and falsification of documents." Thus combating it is a complicated task, a Sisyphean undertaking - but the will to tackle the problem may be the first round in the battle against a heinous human rights violation.  Contact: A. George  (038) 504 604 Ext. 5471  George@un.org Human Rights |

