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Human Trafficking

Speech to AFRUCA NATIONAL CONFERENCE
2004:

Africans United against Child Abuse

**‘The Role of the African Community in
Combating Child Trafficking’**

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It's a great honour to be asked to speak at this important conference on the role of the African community in combating child trafficking.

For three reasons

- I've long been involved in issues concerning the protection of children
- As solicitor General I am deputy to the Attorney General and one of the Governments Law Officers and, as such we are the ministers for the UK's prosecutors - the Crown Prosecution Service
- And as member of parliament for Camberwell and Peckham, many of my constituents come from Africa

So I have a threefold reason to be concerned about child trafficking

- What is happening and
- What we can do about it

We have an opportunity to make progress on this issues because of your commitment and because the government has

- made plain the priority it is giving to children with the appointment of a Minister for Children – Margaret Hodge. She is aware of this conference and has asked me to report back to her
- made plain the priority it is giving to Africa – with the establishment of the Commission for Africa which will report in 2005 and which we creates the opportunity to tackle the poverty and conflict which makes children vulnerable to trafficking.

Though we are here to discuss the protection of African children from the exploitation of child trafficking, I want to begin my comments by setting out the wider picture of trafficking of men, women and children. Trafficking is not just a problem for children and it is not just a problem for Africa. You know this is the case – but it is important that we place it on record.

Most of us will only relatively recently have become aware of the notion of human trafficking. Indeed I remember very well the first time I heard the phrase. That was in Belfast when as Minister for Women under our presidency of the EU in 1998 I hosted the first meeting of EU women ministers when my fellow ministers from Italy and Greece put it firmly on the agenda.

In what I say to you today, I have drawn on the important work of the Crown Prosecution Service who are working to combat human trafficking in prosecutions in local areas and through the work of their European and International Division And from the work being done by the European network of Prosecutors – Eurojust.

And I also draw on the information given to me by my constituents from Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania, from South London African community

organisations such as Women of Nigeria International, African Families Foundation, South London African Women's organisation and the faith groups in Southwark – as well as the important work being done by UNICEF

Because the crime of human trafficking has only recently begun to be widely understood, perhaps I can set out what we understand to be going on.

It is the crime of the trade in a commodity which is more lucrative even than drugs, diamonds or weapons – and that it the trade in young women and children. It is modern-day slavery and it is on the increase.

There are three particular areas of origin for human trafficking

- Thailand and South East Asia
- Eastern Europe
- Africa – mostly West and East

Human Trafficking is where people - mostly women and children (mostly girls between the ages of 12 – 14) are tricked and are brought to Europe into enforced prostitution or slave labour – often domestic labour

There are the traffickers who bring young men and women from China – such as those who died picking cockles at Morcombe Bay.

There are traffickers who bring young women here from Eastern Europe and force them into prostitution.

And there are the traffickers who deal in children. Children brought to Europe for sexual purposes or for domestic slavery – and we are particularly concerned here at this conference on the children who are trafficked here from Africa.

The tragedy is that most of the children who fall prey to trafficking do so because their parents want a better life for them – to help them escape from poverty or war. Or because they have lost their parents.

In Eastern Africa, AIDS has killed many of the adult population – and the orphaned children then fall to be looked after by the surviving adult relatives.

The British Council arranged me a swap with a Tanzanian MP. We were chatting about family things and I told her I had three children. She told me she had 10. Three are her own children – the others are those of her two brothers who have died of AIDS. She is able to care for all those children. Others are less able to – and so people come to such families and say they can help with the problem of so many children and can arrange for some of children to come to the UK for a better life. AIDS has created many orphans and thereby a new supply of vulnerable children to be preyed on by traffickers.

And in West Africa too, children are prey to traffickers. They pose as friends of the community. So a woman from Northern Nigeria, who may be working - but have yet to sort out her immigration status - and who wants to bring her child here will pay the man she thinks is a people smuggler £3,500 and get him to go to her village. They'll be expecting him and he'll pick up the child.

But the child never gets to London – instead she is taken to Germany and forced into prostitution. The trafficker tells the mother. It didn't work – I'll need another £3,500. The child never appears and is too fearful to report her daughter as missing and seek help.

There is a long tradition of families in rural areas of Western Africa sending their children to the cities to get a better education – for “a better life”. But the “better life” that human traffickers offer turns out to be anything but that.

Young women, told of hotel jobs or work as hairdressers find instead that after they've been forced into prostitution – then able to send money back home – their family back home are better off and have a stake in them remaining in their degraded position.

The authorities deport women and children. A foundation working in Lagos came to see me at my constituency surgery. They told me that at Lagos airport they'd seen a group of women who'd been deported back to Lagos from Milan. They still had their big anoraks on as they sweltered in the Lagos heat. They were taken to the police station to be released. Within days they were staying at a house run by the traffickers and within weeks they were back on the streets of Milan. There is a problem of people being “re-trafficked”

African women in my constituency tell me that the victims of child trafficking are routinely subjected to violence as well as sexual abuse.

UNICEF estimates that each year, 1.2 million children are taken from their homes and trafficked into exploitation. They believe that there are thousands of trafficked child in the UK. They estimate that many trafficked children are among the 5,000 children in the sex trade in the UK

What we clearly need to protect women and children from this fearful trade is

- work within the UK
- work between the EU member states and
- work between the we in the UK and the countries of origin.

And our starting point must be that those who are trafficked are victims. It is not us who need protecting from them – but they who need protecting from the traffickers.

Work within the UK: Need to work in partnership across police, immigration, health, education, social services – eg London “Operation Palladin Child” and the similar operation soon to be established by the West Midlands police.

All the agencies need to, and increasingly are, working together. That includes immigration, health, education and social services as well as police and prosecutors.

And they need to draw on the support and expertise of the communities here from the countries of origin.

You are well placed to help our agencies understand what's going on. Your action and involvement – such as this conference - is vital. Without it there would be an uphill struggle. The communities from the countries of origin are keen to help. I saw this at first hand in a meeting in my constituency held to discuss human trafficking.

Debbie Ariyo is already working with the Met led operation Palladin Child. And Oye Ekelemu is a social worker whose family comes from Nigeria who is now working for Southwark Social Services to make the link between them and African families on child protection.

The police, judiciary, prosecutors and social services need to understand the context – whether they are prosecuting criminal offences or taking child protection proceedings

And we are improving the laws which are aimed at trafficking. We need to intervene at the earliest opportunity – protect the victims and prosecute the traffickers and strip them of the proceeds of their most lucrative crimes. – eg Plakici case

Work between EU member states: Traffickers work across Europe – so we need a European-wide response to tackle effectively.

The great increase in travel – particularly air travel - within Europe and between Europe and Africa makes the challenge greater.

A man arrives at Heathrow on a plane from Amsterdam. He says the young girl with him is his girlfriend's daughter and they are here for a holiday. The police suspect otherwise.

The arrival lounge of Heathrow sees a growing number of unaccompanied minors – who may temporarily go into the care of social services – to a family for fostering – and then disappear after a couple of weeks. Or they may have someone to meet them at the airport. The police see in the Arrivals lounge some who they know to be pimps and drug dealers waiting to meet the children they've arranged to come here.

All this requires a co-ordinated and international as well as UK-wide response.

Child protection is now an international issue. No country in Europe can now look on child protection just as domestic issue. Every country must be alert to vulnerable trafficked children as well as “home grown” child abuse.

We are concerned to have high standards of protection for children. That must go for children from abroad as well as those born here.

Child trafficking is an international issue where we all need to work together.

We must not let our borders hamper the effort to tackle traffickers.

Work between our police forces – and through Europol - is vital. The police need quickly to be able to check whether the man who's come from Amsterdam does have a girlfriend there and whether this is indeed her daughter.

The new European constitutional treaty includes provisions which will help
The draft constitutional treaty includes in the draft Article III-158 on the Area of freedom security and justice (building on what is in the existing EU Treaty):

“The union shall constitute an area of freedom security and justice with respect to fundamental rights – taking into account the different legal traditions and systems of the member states.

It looks towards “measures for co-ordination and co-operation between police and judicial authorities and other competent authorities as well as by the mutual recognition of judgments in criminal matters and, if necessary, the approximation of criminal laws”

The approach of successive European treaties has been to create a balance between providing for co-operation between police, prosecutors and judiciary and yet to respect the different legal traditions of the member states and not affect the exercise of their responsibilities incumbent upon members states with regard to maintaining law and order and safeguarding internal security. Article III-163.

The offence may be in one state, evidence in another and proceeds in several others. I strongly share the Prime Minister's commitment to making the case for the new constitutional treaty – for many reasons not least that we need Europe to be closely working together to tackle the problem of human trafficking.

Just as the police work with their counterparts in Europe through Europol, so prosecutors now work across Europe through the European network of prosecutors - Eurojust provides an essential link

Here, too, your work is important. There are African communities in Italy, Holland, France – and across Europe. The African communities across Europe need to work together to help Europe's agencies and governments tackle this problem.

In government, departments need to focus on how their existing work can help tackle trafficking. Many DFID programmes are helping tackle the poverty that makes children vulnerable to trafficking

We need to work closely with the countries of origin to help tackle the problems which make children vulnerable to trafficking and to warn communities in Africa of the dangers that can face their children.

Your work within the communities from the countries of origin who are here in the UK is vital for that.

Our development programmes help combat trafficking in three ways

- **helping tackle the poverty and conflict that makes children vulnerable to trafficking**

We are working towards - fairer trade and greater global equality - so that communities become prosperous as they sell us their goods and services – and tackle the destitution which makes children prey to trafficking.

When parents are able to earn a living adequate for themselves and their children, when they can get good education locally – children will not be vulnerable to trafficking and will be able, in turn, to earn a living when they grow up.

The UK's aid effort is not just the extra resources that we have put into government funds for aid. And our work with other EU countries to increase EU funds. And not just through the vital work of UK based agencies such as Oxfam

African communities here play a vital role in international development and Aid – sending millions of pounds every week back to African countries. And establishing community organisations such as the Peckham-based Association to help the Needy Children of Sierra Leone. – set up by a Sierra Leonian living in Southwark Abraham Williams. And the community centre that is being set up in Ghana by Maria Williams and a group of her fellow Ghanains living in Southwark.

- **helping to inform parents and make communities aware of the dangers for unaccompanied children in the UK.**

Families in Nigeria are more likely to heed a warning from their cousins in Peckham than just hearing from “our man in Lagos”

- **helping to support children who've been trafficked.**

Children who have been trafficked have faced great physical and psychological danger – and their family life has been disrupted and their place in the community threatened. Rehabilitation, resettlement and support of children who have been trafficked is an important and significant challenge. Children who have been rescued need to be cared for. And our development programmes need to, and are, playing their part in the difficult task of resettling children who've been trafficked and who've then returned.

And that brings me to conclude my comments by telling you about the **Commission for Africa**.

The Commission was set up by Prime Minister Tony Blair in April this year, to report in 2005

One key difference between this and previous commissions is that this commission will not just be recommending to those who have the power to act – on this commission are those who have the power to act.

So the Commission will not just be advising those who can take action, but drawing up the programme which will then be put into practice.

The membership of the Commission includes senior members of the UK government – including the Prime Minister himself, The Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, The Secretary of State for the Department for International Development, Hilary Benn, as well as Government ministers from Ethiopia and South Africa, from France and representatives of the UN and international financial institutions.

But as well as government leaders, a vital resource to the voice of the Commission is your experience, knowledge and commitment. You who have made your home in Britain – but whose families and whose hearts remain in the villages and cities of Africa.

The Commission's work will be informed by and enriched by your views.

Together we can make the changes that we all are determined to see.