

## **Chair of the Immigrant Council of Ireland John Cunningham's full speech from the Stop Traffick! Conference**

Invited Guests, partners and colleagues.

I know we are coming to an end of a busy and fruitful day – and I just want to say a few words and reflections to mark the end of proceedings.

It is a tribute and recognition of all your hard work in this important area that through-out the day we were joined by Ireland's lawmakers, senior civil servants and academics in the area of combatting human trafficking.

Of course the video link with European Commissioner Cecilia Malmström shows that the Stop Traffick Project under the guidance of our own Chief Executive Denise Charlton is part of the debate on how to respond to the biggest crime in the EU.

Today's conference has been 18 months in the making.

The report you have produced is a credit to the researchers in all five countries and has delivered results which will shape and reframe the debate on human trafficking at a national level in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Lithuania and Ireland as well as at a European Level.

It is clear from your work that we need to target demand.

Through your efforts you have shattered many of the myths promoted by the 25 billion euro a year sex 'trade'.

We now know that sex buyers are not lonely men isolated from society who are disadvantaged. They are far more likely to be earning wages which are way above average, are well educated and are in a relationship.

We also know that laws targeting demand would make them think again.

It is worth noting that the report confirms that here in Ireland what sex buyers fear most is name or picture in the local paper followed by prosecution.

In terms of the work in Ireland I want to acknowledge the work of our own Anti Trafficking Co-ordinator Nusha Yonkova as well as Monica O'Connor.

Only a few weeks ago I had the honour to travel with Monica to Belfast where we testified before the Justice Committee which is considering the law in Northern Ireland.

Monica's evidence more than any other's will help politicians there to make informed, evidence based laws which will target demand.

It is important now that we ensure all lawmakers across Europe are informed of the fruits of your work.

As partners you must now target your national elected representatives as well as those currently seeking election to the European Parliament and let them know that targeting sex buyers works.

We knew that before from the experience in Sweden and now we know it because through this project the buyers themselves have told us.

So keep up the relationships and partnerships you have formed over the past year and a half – and made even stronger over the past 24 hours – and work together until nowhere in Europe is a safe haven for thugs, pimps and organised crime.

Thank you and safe home.