

Full Denise Charlton speech to the Stop Traffick! Conference March 27th 2014

Members of the Oireachtas, invited guests, partners and colleagues,

I want to again thank our first speakers, Sr Stan, Oireachtas Justice Committee Chair David Stanton TD and Commissioner Malmstrom.

We are gathered today to mark publication of 18 months of research in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Lithuania and Ireland which will make a valuable contribution to Europe's debate on how to shut down the biggest crime of our time.

The fact that elected politicians, the European Commission, the public service, academics and many more have joined us today is a tribute to the hard work and dedication of our partners - as well as the quality of the research they have produced.

We will hear today from Commissioner Malmstrom about the input our findings will have into the debate at EU level – and that in itself is a success.

Her remarks are a stark reminder of what we are here to focus on, the trafficking of girls and women across the continent under false pretences only to have their dreams of a new life turned into a nightmare.

For pimps, traffickers and organised crime the profits are huge – an estimated 25-Billion-Euro every year going into the pockets of thugs who are trampling on the rights of 600-thousand people.

As most of you are aware I am Chief Executive of the lead partner in this project, the Immigrant Council of Ireland.

We provide legal aid to migrant women who are victims of sex trafficking and this has given us direct observations into the dynamics of victim identification and assistance in Ireland.

The Council has a strong track record of research in difficult to research areas, such as the demand that fosters sexual exploitation, which we are launching today. Previously we researched the Irish indoor sex industry and the trafficking of migrant women and girls into it.

We have also launched the UN Gift sponsored study "Asylum Seeking Victims of Trafficking: Legal and Practical Challenges"

Innovative ways we have campaigned against human trafficking - include the Photographic exhibition "Not Natasha" on which we partnered with the Dept of Justice, and the more recent poster campaign "Real Men Don't Buy Girls"

We have also led and participated in transnational projects. We led the EU-Daphne funded Dignity Project, one of the first anti-trafficking projects in Ireland and we are also commencing a project on early legal intervention for victims of human trafficking.

You will have heard Sr Stan outline the grim reality of the stories we hear over and over again – we must never tire of bringing them to public, media and most importantly political attention and ensure that this is a crisis which is responded to.

Over the past year-and-a-half the synchronised work and mutual learning of the partners in Stop Traffick! has expanded and enriched our understanding and has made the conclusions of our work

evidence based and widely applicable.

At this stage you will have all seen either the full report or at the very least the summary, the conclusions are clear: the pimps, traffickers and thugs need demand, and it is well off, middle aged, highly educated men who are driving that demand.

The knowledge we have secured now must guide our discussions on how to reduce demand.

It is a debate which is taking place right across Europe.

The European Parliament, the French National Assembly, a cross-party committee of politicians at Westminster and our own Oireachtas Justice Committee all agree that the path forward is clear – laws targeting the buyers of sex do work.

It is a debate which is also taking place right now in Northern Ireland, New South Wales in Australia and in Canada.

Today we will share information, views and experiences focusing on the result of our work.

We are delighted to be joined for the next session by my colleague and the Anti Trafficking Coordinator Nusha Yonkova and then before Lunch by Dr Ursula Barry of UCD, leading academic in this area Dr Monica O'Connor, Professor Roger Matthews of Kent University who is also an Advisor to the UK Parliamentary All Party Group on Prostitution and Professor Donna Hughes of Rhode Island University.

It is a busy few hours ahead so we won't delay any further and I will ask Nusha to take over proceedings