

Opening speech by Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy at Transnational Stop Traffick! Conference

"Welcome to our elected public representatives, invited guests, partners, officials of the European Commission and Irish Government to this one day conference on the findings of the Stop Traffick project.

I want to particularly acknowledge the presence of the Chair of the Oireachtas Justice Committee, David Stanton this morning – and to thank him not just for being with us today but for the huge amount of time and effort he has devoted to exploring and examining the issues which we will discuss.

Today in Dublin we gather to discuss the greatest crime in Europe – you all know the figures, traffickers are pocketing 25 BILLION EURO a year by exploiting 6-HUNDRED-THOUSAND people right across the EU.

Officials in Brussels use the phrase 'exploiting' but let's be clear about the reality, what we are talking about is the selling of women and girls, men and boys into lives of misery where rape, abuse and violence are the norm.

It is a criminal network which stretches from Galway to Gdansk run by organised criminals who do not see borders as barriers to their trade in human misery – and are as we speak running rings around European law enforcement.

Our police forces, including the Gardaí, are using laws to try and target these gangs which are not fit for purpose.

We owe it to our dedicated police officers to give them the legal powers to carry out their duties and rid our communities of this organised crime.

Ireland maybe on the fringes of Europe, but it is not immune from this crime.

Even in our small country the gangs are out to make a quick buck by trampling on the most basic of human rights.

An estimated 250 MILLION EURO is taken from our economy by the criminals each year.

At the Immigrant Council of Ireland we have in recent years supported 50 women who have been sex-trafficked – their experiences are horrific.

The stories fit a pattern which our frontline services, led by Nusha Yonkova, have heard over and over again.

It is the story of teenage girls sold in their homeland and put on a plane with false promises of a new life, a job or even marriage only for reality to dawn at Dublin Airport.

Within hours they are in a brothel in Temple Bar, Rathmines or in a fast car being transported to Mullingar, Athlone, Cork, Galway or one of our other towns and cities.

It is horrific and it is the reality.

In Ireland by the 68 organisations, including the Immigrant Council, which have formed the Turn Off the Red Light Campaign are working to change that reality.

We are trade unionists, employers, students, nurses, doctors, farmers, human rights groups and perhaps most importantly the survivors of prostitution who are telling our lawmakers enough is enough.

Our aims also have the support of leading academics, researchers and members of the legal community – I want to also acknowledge the presence of Monica O'Connor who has worked closely with us on these issues.

Deputy Stanton knows this – he and his committee studied 800 written submissions, they listened to six months of hearings, they heard every argument, debated every point before coming to the UNANIMOUS decision that targeting demand is the best way to end this crime.

Last June Deputy Stanton's Committee delivered its recommendations for laws targeting the buyers of sex.

It was a milestone moment – not just for Ireland but for the debate in Europe.

Since then we have seen the French National Assembly, the European Parliament and a Cross Party Committee in Westminster come to the exact same conclusion.

As we gather today, Ireland and Europe has an opportunity to shut this criminal industry down.

The recommendations you will make today, like those of the Oireachtas Justice Committee and those made in Paris, Brussels and London are the blueprint for our lawmakers to follow.

I wish you very success in your continued deliberations and look forward to seeing the fruits of our efforts with national and European laws to put traffickers, pimps and thugs out of business".