

MISSION PERMANENTE DU LIBAN
AUPRES DE
L'OFFICE DES NATIONS UNIES
A GENEVE

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Comments
of
Ambassador Gebran SOUFAN
on the report of Ms. Sigma HUDA,
Special Rapporteur
on the
Human Rights aspects of the Victims
of trafficking in persons,
“ Mission to Lebanon ”

Geneva, September 20, 2006

Mr. President,

Upon official instructions, I conveyed to Madam Sigma Huda, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights aspects of the victims of trafficking, the observations of Lebanese Departments on her report pursuant to her visit to Lebanon at the invitation of the Lebanese Government from 7 to 16 September 2005. Those administrations are mainly:

- The Ministry of Labor
- The Ministry of Justice
- The Ministry of Interior Affairs
- And the Department of General Security affiliated with the latter.

Details are contained in my communications :

No.5/2006 dated January 4, 2006

No. 16/2006 dated January 18, 2006

No. 49/2006 dated January 13, 2006

and No. 355/2006 dated August 16, 2006.

And hence, Lebanon has replied, from all perspectives, to different aspects of the report.

In sparing you the time, Mr. President, I would say briefly that the Lebanese Government welcomed, at the outset, the visit of the special rapporteur to Lebanon, as we acknowledge the need to continue to address the issue of human trafficking, specially domestic migrant workers and any other abuse to workers, and to do it the best possible way, with transparency, as we have nothing to hide.

On the Rapporteur's recommendations, we take them, as meant, to provide "a guiding framework to the Government and

civil society on how to better prevent and combat trafficking and protect trafficked persons”. Therefore I wish to assure, Madam the Special Rapporteur, that we don’t see offense “where strong words were due”, as stated in paragraph 6 of her report.

Moreover, the Ministry of Justice was keen on thanking her as well as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the efforts deployed to prepare a report which reflect the appropriate initiative to assist Lebanon as well as the International Community. Furthermore, the Director General of this Ministry valued all the comprehensive and important proposals which were made and welcomed the technical assistance, wherever needed to tackle the problem of trafficking in persons.

The Department of Labor went over many paragraphs to clarify our intention and determination, as it wants to improve and not to bluntly or blindly disapprove. In turn, in a letter dated March 15, 2006, Madam Special Rapporteur praised the Ministry of Labor for establishing, by decree, specialized Committees, which echoed some of the concerns expressed in her report. She considers the establishment of these committees as “very positive developments and a sign of the good will of the Government to take all necessary steps to protect women in the domestic service from exploitation and abuse”.

However, and for the sake of clarity, we will not also shy away from underscoring few points:

- 1- The trafficking in children, is not an issue in Lebanon. There is no business of children trafficking perse, or a cross border children trafficking. While exploiting street children, as beggars by adult handlers, should be addressed properly and effectively, this matter does not imply the existence of organized criminal groups. A

competent security office finds the description a little bit “excessive”, if I may.

- 2- With regard to paragraph B of the report, the intention is to regulate the sex industry, given what the Rapporteur herself described as strong public disapproval of prostitution on the one hand, with the demands of a large and lucrative market for prostitution on the other. But if these rules play into the hands of exploitative impresarios, that does not mean in anyway that the directives of the General Security Department facilitate sexual exploitation
- 3- The root causes of human trafficking should be tackled not only in the transit and destination countries, but in the sending countries as well.
- 4- The ability to deliver better depends on the technical assistance we may receive, as underlined by the Director General of the Justice Department in his letter to the Special Rapporteur.
Therefore, we are encouraged that the Lebanese “Safe house” for abused migrant domestic workers is considered an “exemplary institution” by Madam Special Rapporteur. Yet expanding this initiative requires adequate resources.
- 5- A National Human Rights Action Plan has been adopted by the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee. Stakeholders include NGO’s as well as the UN country team and the Regional Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Beirut. It is an ambitious and comprehensive blueprint and it stresses the importance of implementation and monitoring (paragraph 83 of the report) and Lebanon’s obligations under International Law.

6- Therefore, and in reference to paragraph 2 of the report regarding “a human rights culture”, I wish to reassure that the latter is deeply rooted in our traditions, values and way of life. Yet, it is always a challenge to improve our record.

Finally, Mr. President,

I would like to thank Madam the Special Rapporteur for her “constructive criticism”, no doubt about it, but also for affirming that my Government “has shown a remarkable degree of openness and cooperation during the course of her visit” to Lebanon.

And when Madam the Special Rapporteur describes “the vibrant civil society”, as “distinguishing Lebanon in the region”, we feel indeed deeply gratified.

I thank you.