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Churches in Europe encourage closer cooperation to combat trafficking in human beings

Christian anti-trafficking network hosts event to "network the networks"

Representatives of some of the most experienced international networks combating trafficking in human beings have met for an international conference in Utrecht/NL 28-31 May in order to identify possible areas of future cooperation. Invited by the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), the workshop "networking the network" brought together participants from networks such as La Strada International, Anti-Slavery International and the Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women. The Dutch Protestant Church and the Foundation of Religious against Trafficking in Women hosted the event as part of the project "Christian Action and Networking against Trafficking in Women" (CAT).

During the three-day workshop, participants discussed new challenges in the fight against trafficking in human beings and exchanged experiences of their ongoing work. Broad space was devoted to identifying the strengths and specific competence of the different networks and to see how these could be combined in the interest of preventing and combating trafficking in human beings.

Common strategies for advocacy for the rights of trafficked persons on European and international level were highlighted as an area where better cooperation was of particular importance. The different organisations shared the view that advocacy for better possibilities for legal migration and the protection of the rights and working conditions of all migrant workers were essential part of such joint efforts. Participants exchanged experiences on recent challenges to a rights-based approach, which puts the interest and self-determination of (potential) victims of trafficking at the centre of policies. They in this context rejected ideas, which had been put forward by some anti-trafficking initiatives in the context of preventing trafficking around the football world cup and aimed at forbidding women from perceived "risk countries" to travel during the time of the football world cup.

The meeting also was an occasion for extensive encounters between international networks and Dutch NGOs, churches, governmental representatives and police. Various Dutch NGOs underlined the problem connected with restrictive migration policies in the Netherlands. Representatives of the Dutch Refugee Council explained how the current deterioration of standards of treating asylum claims of unaccompanied minors in the asylum procedure resulted in high numbers of accompanied minors being trafficked. Representatives of the independent National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings also underlined how a repressive climate around migration and the practice of immediate removal of undocumented migrants made it very difficult to identify trafficked persons in different areas of exploitation.

"Different European and International networks against human trafficking with different strengths and profiles have developed over the last decade," explained Torsten Moritz, coordinator of the CAT project. "While we all can profit from cooperation, lack of mutual knowledge and sometimes even a sense of competition has on occasions characterised relations between these networks. We hope that our workshop will help to overcome that situation among networks with shared perspectives and will encourage closer and more regular cooperation," he added.

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