

UN to host first conference on human trafficking

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A Thai policeman looks at an exhibition of photos during the opening of a workshop on Human Trafficking at the Government House in Bangkok, in 2004. The first international conference on human trafficking, one of the fastest growing crimes, will be held in Vienna next month to raise awareness about what has become a billion-dollar industry, organisers said Tuesday. (AFP/File)

The first international conference on human trafficking, one of the fastest growing crimes, will be held in Vienna next month to raise awareness about what has become a billion-dollar industry, organisers said Tuesday.

"Human trafficking exists everywhere in the world, in all societies. There are no exceptions," said Doris Buddenberg, head of UN.GIFT (the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking), an initiative by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

"It's almost certainly one of the fastest growing crimes in our globalised world," Buddenberg told a news conference here.

"It is above all big business. The UN estimates that the [global market](#) value is in billions of dollars. And that is

one of the most cautious estimates."

The aim of the three-day conference from February 13 to 15, with an anticipated 1,000 participants from some 100 countries, is to raise public awareness of the issue, foster better coordination in the international fight against human trafficking and come with new measures for combatting it, Buddenberg said.

Other international organisations will be represented at the [meeting](#), such as the UN children's agency UNICEF, the UN human rights body OHCHR, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Other expected participants include law enforcement officers, judicial and social work experts, as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and [private sector](#) companies.

Workshops will be held on a wide range of topics, from forced labour and sexual exploitation to the trafficking in persons for the removal of organs and body parts.

There will also be two accompanying high-profile projects open to the public -- a special Film Forum, featuring some 58 feature films and documentaries; and "Journey", an art installation conceived by award-winning British actress Emma Thompson, "which uses seven transport

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containers to illustrate the brutal and harrowing experiences of women sold into the sex trade."

The installation had already been put on display in London's Trafalgar Square in September, where it attracted some 15,000 visitors in just seven days. And Vienna will form the first leg of a European tour that will see "Journey" travel to Spain and Italy among other countries this year, said Thompson's assistant, Kerstin Shields.

The head of UNODC's anti-human trafficking unit, Kristiina Kangaspunta, said it was difficult to collect data on human-trafficking, given the hidden nature of the crime.

But according to UN estimates, about 2.5 million people from 127 countries have been trafficked to 137 countries for purposes such as forced labour, sexual exploitation, the removal of organs and body parts, forced marriages, child adoption and begging, Kangaspunta said.

"It really is a global phenomenon. Almost everyone of us has encountered victims of human trafficking in one way or another, even if we don't know it," she said.

Kangaspunta was keen to point out that human trafficking differed from straightforward migrant smuggling, where smugglers made their profits from simply transporting people across borders illegally.

Human traffickers made their money from exploiting their victims, often over long periods of time, Kangaspunta said.

UN.GIFT chief Buddenberg noted that trafficking networks could not function without corruption, including corrupt government officials or [police](#).

"Corruption is the oil in the machinery that allows these systems to work," Buddenberg said. "That's one of the points that the conference also plans to tackle."

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