

VIENNA FORUM TO FIGHT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

**DRAFT SPEAKING NOTES FOR VERNON COAKER
13TH FEBRUARY**

UK STATEMENT

Thank you Mr Chairman

I would like to say how pleased I am to be able to participate in this Forum and I would like to thank the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) who with the support of the United Arab Emirates have provided us with an opportunity to focus on this important subject and share our experiences, strategies and expertise.

I am especially pleased to be here after attending the launch of the Global Initiative in London on the 26th March last year.

2007 was an important commemorative year for the United Kingdom marking the passage of 200 years since the British Parliament adopted legislation to abolish the slave trade in what was then the British Empire. Whilst we reflected on the past we also focused on the plight of those who are still forced to live in slave like conditions as a result of the inhuman criminal practices perpetrated by 21st century traffickers.

The United Kingdom is deeply committed to tackling human trafficking and the organised crime groups who profit from the misery of others.

We recognise that trafficking is an international crime, operating across borders and in order to have maximum impact we must work with international partners to provide a global solution. It is only through transit, source and destination states working in concert that advances can be made.

To this end, I am pleased to say that we have recently undertaken a number of national initiatives to push forward our work in this area.

We have published and are actively implementing our national Action Plan which sets out a wide range of measures in the key areas of prevention/ enforcement/ protection and assistance to adult victims and child trafficking.

We have signed and are pursuing ratification this year of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against trafficking in human beings which is an important regional instrument that adds to the provisions of the UN Palermo Protocol in the area of victim protection and assistance.

We have worked hard on developing a robust enforcement response to this horrendous crime by establishing a police-led, multi-agency UK Human Trafficking Centre to complement the work of the Serious Organised Crime Agency.

We are also in the midst of a nation-wide operation seeking to proactively identify and rescue victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation from across the UK.

However, what matters most is not what we say we are doing in action plans or commitments we make in international treaties but the impact we are making on the ground.

Are we identifying, rescuing and protecting victims? Are we investigating and prosecuting the criminals who perpetrate the exploitation? Are we being successful in preventing a person becoming a victim in the first place?

We understand that although progress has been made in recent years there is still much to do and we cannot be complacent. As Governments we must take action. We must collaborate with each other and look for opportunities and solutions rather than see barriers and difficulties – we must be bold.

I believe the focus of this Forum on the key themes of vulnerability, impact, and action will provide the basis for further and much needed international co-operation in tackling this horrendous crime. The GIFT initiative is to be welcomed in its attempt to facilitate and channel existing efforts into a cohesive framework. The challenge will be to harness the debate and exchange of good practice fostered by the Forum into renewed, targeted and effective action. We do not want our legacy to be discussion rather than impact.

I look forward to listening to the contributions today and feel certain that this Forum will provide substantial inputs for the next stage of our global fight to eradicate human trafficking.

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