Combating the Trafficking of Persons on Peace Operations*

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(This article was inspired by, and draws heavily on, the Training Package on Human Rights for Military Personnel of Peace Operations produced by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and in particular its Module on Trafficking in Human Beings, earlier versions of which Bruce Oswald contributed to. It responds to the growing problem of trafficking of persons for the purposes of economic or sexual exploitation during peace operations. The article recognises the fact that many of the victims of trafficking find themselves exploited in areas where peace operations are conducted, reinforcing the need for peacekeepers to develop practical and effective means and methods for dealing with those responsible for people trafficking, and protecting and assisting their victims. This article seeks to encourage peacekeepers to consider the multidimensional and complex nature of trafficking of persons, and to provide a framework through which they can vigorously oppose the trafficking of persons in their area of operation, in cooperation with appropriate agencies and organisations.)

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Introduction

"The entire time, I must smile and make them believe I am enjoying the humiliation," Olenka said in a barely audible whisper. "These men were animals. They cared nothing that I was there as a prisoner. They simply wanted sex." She doesn’t know the names of any of the men who used her over that period, but she remembers the uniforms and the insignias emblazoned on their shoulders – American, Canadian, British, Russian, French. Many were soldiers. Some were police officers with the UN. Others were among the thousands of workers – either with the myriad international agencies or the UN – that flooded the region [Balkans] after the conflict.1

The trafficking of persons for the purposes of economic or sexual exploitation2 during peace operations is gaining considerable prominence. For example, in early 2002 a study by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Save the Children UK made serious allegations of widespread sexual exploitation and abuse of refugee and internally displaced women and children by humanitarian workers and peacekeepers in West Africa.3 In addition, in May 2004 Amnesty International wrote a detailed report in which it criticised the limited role that peacekeepers in Kosovo have played in stopping the trafficking of persons and the inadequate responses of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to assist and protect the victims of trafficking.4 Refugee International has also criticised the aggressive approach taken by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in trying to stop trafficking in Liberia because “high profile raids on clubs and “rescues” of trafficked women [by] UNMIL may actually be putting these [trafficked] women in higher risk of danger.” In light of there being an estimated 70,000 to 4 million people who are trafficked around the world annually, and evidence that victims are becoming increasingly younger, one can only encourage and support the increasing number of advocates of the victims of people trafficking.5 The fact that many of the

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2 For a more detailed definition of trafficking, see below in 18 and accompanying text.
4 Amnesty International Report, "Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro); 'So Does it Mean that We Have the Right?': Protecting the Human Rights of Women and Girls Trafficked for Forced Prostitution in Kosovo", AI Index: EUR 70/010/2004, 6 May 2004.
6 Differences in estimates are caused by inaccurate data and use of different definitions. The US State Department has estimated that every year, 800,000 to 900,000 people are trafficked (most of them women and children): John Miller, Director of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, “On the Record Briefing on the Rollout of the June 2003 Trafficking in Persons Annual Report”, available at http://www.state.gov/g/tep/ris/rism/512404p.htm.