**CONFERENCE ON:**

**GOOD PRACTICES IN IDENTIFYING CHILDREN AT RISK OF EXPLOITATION AND TRAFFICKING**

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**Amir Hashemi-Nik** Comments on the presentation from Mr Rudolf Christoffersen on the Challenges for the police and prosecution authorities in identifying and protecting child victims of trafficking.

Amir Hashemi-Nik - Development Manager – County Administrative Board of Stockholm. I am the national coordinator for a government assignment dealing with missing UAMs in Sweden. Thank you very much Mr Christoffersen for a great presentation. And thank you for inviting me to give my comments.

As we just heard from Mr Christoffersens presentation, we can learn a lot from case studies. The sunshine stories and the cases when everything has gone wrong. At the County Administrative Board of Stockholm, we have in the past years conducted studies based on cases. An example of such study is the one you could hear about earlier today from my colleague Maria von Bredow.

In a different study by the CAB of Stockholm, that was published last year, on suspected child trafficking cases in Sweden, we can see similar challenges as was described by Mr Christoffersen. In Sweden we also have big challenges in bringing traffickers and criminal gangs to justice for the exploitation and trafficking of children. The study looked at 70 reports to the Police of suspected child trafficking cases 2015 and half of 2016. Only one of the cases led to prosecution. The majority of the cases in the study were handled by Police officers and prosecutors with no specific training and experience in trafficking cases. Which led to many mistakes being made in the handling of the cases.

The only case that actually led to prosecution had some important elements that I want to quickly point at:

* early reconnaissance gave results and gave a good foundation for the rest of the handling of the case,
* the police had enough resources (which is not always the case),
* experienced prosecutors and police officers were involved in the case from the start,
* intense cooperation between the different actors (and within the law enforcement agencies),
* full support and protection of the child (victim),
* and last but not least a stubborn multidisciplinary team with a common goal.

The study also shows that only 8 percent of the children in the study had Swedish citizenship. 66% of them had come to Sweden as unaccompanied minors. And this brings me to the work we have done in Sweden with the issue of missing unaccompanied children.

Since 2016, we have mapped the situation, we have proposed an action plan to the government (with 20 action points) and tried to assist the regional actors in creating protocols and guidelines on prevention and response to UAMs going missing from care.

As you may know we have 21 counties in Sweden (including 290 municipalities, with a lot of autonomy). And in the reception of UAMs to Sweden, each child is assigned a municipality to live in during their asylum process. So the reception of UAMs is decentralized and there are many actors involved in different parts of the process. This makes coordination and cooperation somewhat complex.

This year we have an assignment from the government to produce regional memorandum of understandings among the different actors (CABs, Municipalities, law enforcement authorities, migration services and civil society actors) in each of the 21 counties. So at the end of this year we should have produced guidelines in all counties for a better multidisciplinary and interagency cooperation. This is important for many reasons, but particularly it gives everyone a better understanding of each actor’s specific role in different parts of the process, the mandates they have and create common definitions and working methods that can contribute to a better protection of the most vulnerable children and youth.

So what we have tried to do, and continue doing, is to have a holistic integrated approach with a broad range of actors involved on all levels from the local reality where the child is, to regional and national levels.

The holistic approach also means that we need to look at the cross border elements of missing children: therefor we are also part of the AMINA project run by Missing Children Europe. We are involved in the part of the project that will produce European guidelines on how to improve cooperation among member states when a child goes missing in one member state and is found in another. We are doing this through a case study, following the path of the child throughout Europe. A simulation exercise is being conducted in autumn.

One of the points in the Oslo conclusions that I think is important to raise and continue working with, is the one about a broader view of situations of neglect, violence and exploitation that may lead to child trafficking and the necessity to prevent these situations from happening. As Ms Maud de Boer-Buquicchio was mentioning earlier we need to be better at connecting migration policies with anti-trafficking policies to better be able to detect and protect the most vulnerable children from ending up in trafficking. The protection and care of vulnerable children that are on the move and that can’t be confirmed as trafficked must be strengthened.

And unfortunately, the trend is going in the wrong direction, we do push children and young people into the hands of traffickers in Europe today.

There is an unfortunate race to the bottom in Europe by most countries to dismantle their reception structures and quality of care, with the aim not to attract refugees and migrants.

Sweden has somewhat been forced to adapt to this situation by implementing more restrictive policies and lowering its standards of reception, not to attract asylum seekers. In the past few years there have been changes to the legislation in order to make the asylum policy more restrictive, these changes have come in a very rapid pace, they have generally been hard to explain to children, they have created confusion among adults that are around the child, and hence they have created more uncertainty, mental ill health, hopelessness and resulted in greater number of disappearances.

It’s perhaps a pessimistic end to my intervention, but a reality we need to have in mind when we try to work on real solutions to protect children from exploitation and trafficking in the EU.

Thank you!