

“...the predators who exploit and abuse vulnerable women, children and men never cease in their nefarious work. They never take a holiday. Nor can we.”

*Excerpts of remarks by Rep. Chris Smith, U.S.A.
Special Representative on Human Trafficking Issues for the OSCE
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Thank you, President Cederfelt.

As the [Special Representative on Human Trafficking Issues](#) I especially want to thank you Madam President and members of our Parliamentary Assembly for your extraordinary efforts to combat the cruelty of sex and labor trafficking.

As we all know, the predators who exploit and abuse vulnerable women, children and men never cease in their nefarious work. They never take a holiday.

Nor can we.

Our commitment to preventing human trafficking, protecting, and rescuing victims and helping them reclaim their lives and prosecuting those who commit these horrific crimes must be strong, powerful, and courageous.

None of us can ever grow weary in this life saving work. Too many precious lives are at risk.

As we emerge from the pandemic, each of us need to examine our anti-trafficking in persons’ laws and action plans in place before and during COVID-19 and decide whether new initiatives are needed.

Are we doing enough to prevent the victimization of vulnerable persons—especially now—such as Ukrainian women and children?

Have trafficking survivors lost their jobs or homes due to struggling economies—what are we doing to ensure they are safe from being re-trafficked?

Prevention programs should not just prevent people from ever being trafficked but also should prevent survivors from being re-trafficked.

Are each of our laws and action plans being implemented to the maximum extent possible?

Is law enforcement prioritizing catching the bad guys and are prosecutors and judges holding perpetrators to account?

As the prime author of the U.S. [Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000](#)—my country’s historic comprehensive law to combat sex and labor trafficking—I believe we are all capable of doing more.

I—along with Senator John Cornyn of Texas—who is here today have recently sponsored new anti-trafficking in persons’ legislation designed to strengthen existing law and create new initiatives.

Like you, we have listened very carefully to trafficking survivors to enhance our law to make it truly survivor and trauma informed.

Knowing that finding a decent and safe place to live—a home— is essential to provide stability for victim’s healing and journey to a better life, we are creating a new \$175 million authorization over five years for housing.

Stabilization and safety go hand-in-hand and is a critical first step toward healing, but then what next? Survivors have told us they need to sustain their growth and healing and need our help to facilitate their growth toward true empowerment.

As a result, we expanded our survivor social services to include wrap-around social services with individualized case management that will connect survivors to appropriate care and services, such as mental health care, housing, education, and employment. This also includes workforce training, professional development, and higher education opportunities—we need to invest in their future and develop our survivor-leaders!

We also cannot forget to prevent trafficking in the first place, starting with our young people. We’ve strengthened our situational awareness training for our young people in school so they will be better empowered to identify a potential trafficking situation and take evasive steps to avoid being victimized.

We also took it a step further to create a sustainable solution by training the trainers in public schools so that teachers and guardians can continue to spread this training to others. We also ask them to partner with key community organizations—law enforcement and social media companies.

And of course, all of us remain deeply concerned for all of the victims of Putin's war against Ukraine—and that includes the historic number of victims vulnerable to trafficking.

More than [8.4 million refugees](#) have fled Ukraine since Russia's massive invasion of Ukraine on February 24, the largest migration of people in Europe since the second world war. The number of IDPs has also skyrocketed.

Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova have taken in unprecedented number of refugees—about 5.5 million—and have done so with incredible generosity.

Given Ukraine's exit restrictions on males from 18-60, UNHCR estimates that 90% of those leaving Ukraine are women and children. Most cross the Ukrainian border without resources or a place to stay, making them extremely vulnerable to criminals, including human traffickers.

Trafficking networks from Ukraine to EU countries were already well-established before the war, and Ukrainian women were trafficked into the EU more than from any other country.

There have been credible reports from border areas where refugees are crossing that traffickers are trolling trying to lure refugees with promises of accommodation, onward transportation, or employment. Some are masquerading as volunteers and others are working as aid workers.

Traffickers reportedly using online methods such as social media and online advertising to lure potential victims, including through posts offering housing, employment, or other assistance. The longer the refugees have to remain outside of Ukraine, the more vulnerable they will become as they try to find longer term housing and employment.

Traffickers are now increasingly exploiting Ukrainian women and children via online pornography and child sexual abuse materials.

Children are particularly vulnerable. Almost half of Ukrainian refugees are children. Thousands are unaccompanied, either because they have been evacuated from state care in Ukraine or because they have lost their parents or guardians to the war. We need to ensure that children are safe and taken care of, and we must be able to reunite them with family after the war.

I am also very concerned about reports that civilians – including children - are being forcibly deported by Russian forces from Ukraine to Russia, where they are at risk of broad human rights violations, including human trafficking. These children are at high risk of being adopted and assimilated in Russia, which could amount to a war crime and even genocide as part of an intentional destruction of Ukrainian identity. Alarmingly, in May, Putin issued a decree simplifying the procedure for obtaining Russian citizenship for Ukrainian orphans or children left without parental care, particularly in the temporarily occupied territories.

Recently, as the security situation has improved in eastern Ukraine, some refugees have returned. Some have gone back to check on their homes or family left behind, while others have used up their savings. But this does not mean that we can close the reception centers, housing and employment programs set up to support them, nor anti-trafficking awareness efforts to protect them from traffickers. As Russia continues its bloody invasion, many of these refugees may have to return in the Fall as food insecurity and energy shortages worsen and their children need to go back to school.

The sooner this war ends, the sooner Ukrainian refugees can go home and begin to rebuild their lives. Vladimir Putin is a dictator and serial war criminal who needs to be stopped right now. His barbaric assault on Ukraine has provoked a massive humanitarian crisis.

Finally, I would like to commend an updated and revised OSCE tool that I believe will strengthen laws and policies to combat human trafficking both in our countries and in our efforts to identify and assist Ukrainian refugees who may fall victim to traffickers - the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) handbook on National Referral Mechanisms.

It shares government policies and introduces critical concepts that recognize the importance of age-appropriate and trauma-informed approaches.

It also recognizes the key role that survivors play in informing policy and programming. Survivors are the real experts. Their lived experiences and voices are essential for effective policies and legislation.

I encourage each of you to use this valuable tool to strengthen our efforts in this battle against human trafficking.

Thank you.