



SOVEREIGN HOSPITALLER ORDER
OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM OF RHODES AND OF MALTA

Ambassador to monitor and combat trafficking in persons

Webinar : Insights from the 2024 Global Thematic Report on Sport Trafficking

Keynote Address by Michel Veuthey
Ambassador to monitor and combat trafficking in persons

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Excellencies, Dear Friends,

I would like to thank Lerina Bright for her kind invitation. I would also like to congratulate *Mission 89, Loughborough University, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK* and all the researchers and authors who have contributed to this amazing 2024 Global Thematic Report on Trafficking in Sport.

The year 2025 marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations of the [Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons](#), one of the most important legal instruments in the fight against human trafficking. However, despite these numerous legal instruments at our disposal, considering that trafficking in human beings is a crime against humanity, and as the Report perfectly illustrates, the tragedy of trafficking in human beings remains of paramount concern. Unfortunately, it continues to grow in almost all countries and sectors. Since 2016, the International Labor Organization (ILO) has recorded a 25 percent increase in the number of victims.

Today, **the global human trafficking business generates \$236 billion in illicit profits annually** and has **50 million victims**, including a disturbing number of children. Modern slavery “involves an act of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harboring or receiving a person through the use of force, coercion, or other means, for the purpose of exploiting them” ([UNODC](#)) and takes many forms, from forced labor, sexual exploitation and forced marriage to forced recruitment into armed groups. And even if it is almost unknown, the field of sport is not excluded. In fact, as the report points out, many human rights violations, including forms of human trafficking, have been observed in sport. **In sport, trafficking can occur in, through, and around sport.** Migrants, one of the most vulnerable groups to trafficking, are often extorted by unscrupulous agents and smugglers posing as collectors for major football clubs. Sexual exploitation in sport is also a major problem, mainly targeting women and children, but not only!

Thus, the main question that arises now is: **How can we better prevent and combat trafficking?**

First, it is imperative to prevent human trafficking by enforcing and implementing a strong legal framework at the national, regional and international levels, but most importantly by raising awareness among the public and, as the report recommends, policy makers, including

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parliamentarians and legislators, sports organizations, law enforcement officials, prosecutors, judges and magistrates, service providers, research and academia. Allow me to add business, media and religious leaders and communities. This could be done by conducting research, as Lerina Bright and her team have done so well, by organizing awareness campaigns, webinars and other events in various international institutions, but also by conducting training courses that include experts as well as victims and survivors. In this regard, the Sovereign Order of Malta is active, collaborating with various UN agencies and other partners, and participating in the UN decision-making process, especially in the Human Rights Council, where we regularly intervene. Recently, the Order of Malta signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) focusing on training on trafficking in human beings. This agreement will first be implemented through the joint organization of a side event on trafficking in human beings next Friday, 28 March at the Palais des Nations, during the 58th session of the Human Rights Council, entitled "After 25 years of the Palermo Protocol, the need for real action that makes a difference". This will be followed by an online course from 15 January to 15 February 2026 to provide specialized training on victim identification, legal frameworks and inter-agency coordination for United Nations staff and partners.

Second, Governments must effectively prosecute traffickers by strengthening the legal framework, enhancing cross-border cooperation, and ensuring effective penalties for traffickers.

Third, Governments and civil society must protect the victims of trafficking. Protecting victims of trafficking means ensuring their legal rights and access to health care and rehabilitation. It is essential to protect their privacy and safety. They should not be punished for acts committed under coercion. These measures allow for better support and effective reintegration of victims.

Fourth, compensating victims is key to the process of eradicating human trafficking. Indeed, providing financial resources to victims supports their recovery and reintegration and contributes to a more just and supportive system for survivors. In this regard, it is essential to remove financial incentives by confiscating illicit profits and making them available to victims. This measure will help to reduce the profitability of trafficking.

Finally, Governments and civil society shall ensure the rehabilitation of victims by providing legal assistance, health care, and long-term psychological and social support.

The fight against trafficking in human beings must be included in the context of **transitional justice**, which includes all the mechanisms mentioned above. It aims to strengthen the institutions of the State, the confidence of individuals in them and, whenever possible, reconciliation.