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### Abduction of Children in India



The problem of the abduction of children in India, where child labour is widely used and child prostitution is fairly common, as well as of young women, has always been rather acute, but in recent years it has reached an unprecedented scale. According to the Indian human rights organisation Dalit Freedom Network, every five last years the number of missing children in the country has been increasing by 50%: if in 2004, 44 thousand children went missing in the country, in 2009 this number stood at 60 thousand, and in 2013 it may exceed 80 thousand. New Delhi alone sees about 2 thousand children disappearing annually, including young girls and female adolescents.

According to the study conducted by the Indian non-governmental organisation ATSEC (Action Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children) fighting against the abduction and sexual exploitation of children, these types of crimes have particularly affected the states of Jharkhand, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh. The analysis of the information submitted by this NGO to the Ministry of Home Affairs of India shows that, since the establishment of the state of Jharkhand in 2000, more than one million girls have been abducted in its territory, 10% of whom are now domestic workers in New Delhi. Abducted children are, as a rule, from the lower castes or from the so-called scheduled tribes. The rampant poverty of the majority of India's population, about 80% of whom live in rural areas, and very hard socio-economic conditions of life often force parents to voluntarily sell their children into prostitution. For example, according to the information gathered by the Indian Health Organisation's staff as a result of studying the situation in the 'red light' district of Mumbai, about 10% of the female child prostitutes working here were sold into sexual slavery by their own fathers.

A distinguishing feature of the criminal business of the abduction of children in India is the fact that 90% of it is concentrated in the national territory: children are just transferred between the states, and they are often even left in the same region where they were abducted. Only 10% of the cases of slave trafficking have a cross-border nature, when children are brought into the country, including by transit, from Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Cambodia and Myanmar. Depending on the conditions in different states, the abducted, lured into a trap of promised good employment or bought children can be used in such spheres as hard forced labour in some production (mainly in coal mines and construction), employment as domestic workers, agricultural work (particularly during a season), begging, prostitution, engaging in the entertainment industry (performances in street circus, different shows), adoption, forced marriage, illegal removal of internal organs for transplantation, nurturing of fighters for criminal or rebel forces.

Indian society has long felt the need for strengthening the activities of the law enforcement bodies and increasing the effectiveness of their counter-response to children trafficking. The alarming situation in this respect has been repeatedly emphasised in the documents of the United Nations and international human rights organisations. Both inside the country and at the international level, it has been pointed out that the authorities do not have a clear-cut programme to combat this type of crime, which hinders the centralised collection, accumulation and analysis of statistical data, the definition of the trends of its development, as well as the outlining of appropriate measures.

Only at the end of 2010, at a time when the named problem had acquired the scale of a national disaster, the government of India approved the Strategy of Strengthening the Law Enforcement Response in India Against Trafficking in Persons through Training and Capacity Building. Then, in April 2011, the Ministry of Home Affairs

announced its decision to establish specialised police units in 335 regions of the country, as well as to provide appropriate training for the staff engaged in this sphere.

Since the strategy provides for close collaboration between the police forces working in this sphere and the representatives of the ministries of health and family welfare, labour and employment, tourism, social justice and empowerment, the ministry of railways in the centre and in the field, as well as the representatives of non-governmental organisations, the created structures were called the Integrated Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (IAHTU). They are provided with motor vehicles and mobile phones. The premises of each IAHTU has a telephone, which can be used by a victim or anyone who has some information about a crime that has been or is going to be committed against a child or a woman.

Taking into account the experience gained by the Indian law enforcement bodies in the field of fighting against people trafficking and sexual slavery, as well as the recommendations of the UN agencies and human rights organisations which conducted relevant research in India, the police officers working in the IAHTU were entrusted with the following functions:

- timely collection, dissemination (preparation of guidance) and use of information about the victims of crimes and the abductors;
- maintaining the database of all categories of criminals: recruiters, actual perpetrators of abductions, buyers, sellers, carriers, owners of the places where victims are held, "clients", persons financing the organisation and execution of abductions etc.;
- creation of the database of all crime sites, routes of the transportation of abducted persons, destinations, as well as cover-ups used for the purposes of sexual exploitation (massage parlours, pubs, clubs by interests, cinema clubs, video salons etc.);
- execution of well-planned operations to free the victims of crime;
- involvement of the representatives of other government entities and NGOs in the work with the victims after their release;
- investigation into all circumstances of crimes in order to punish their organisers and perpetrators in the most speedy and severe manner, consolidating investigative practice in the judicial process, including participation in the preparation of the indictment;
- participation in interaction with the relevant departments and NGOs aimed at the return of the victims to their families;
- carrying out control, jointly with the prosecutor's office, of the execution of court decisions (payment of compensations to the affected party, closure of dens etc.);
- control of the living areas of the communities which are vulnerable in terms of the possibility of abductions happening there;
- monitoring the transit hubs (railway stations, bus stations, public transport stops) to locate the abduction victims that are being trafficked and to suppress such offences in a timely manner;
- staying in permanent touch with the government entities and HGOs concerned in order to include them in all activities associated with solving the slave trafficking problem;
- involvement of the civil society institutions and any other organisations, willing to provide assistance, in the activities aimed at the rehabilitation of victims;
- maintaining close contacts with the media, as agreed with the management.

In line with the decision of the Ministry of Home Affairs of India, IAHTU have now been created in all of the 11 districts of the capital, as well as in a whole number of regions in the states of Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, in the east of Uttar Pradesh and in other regions and states. Given the extent of this type of criminal activity in India, the measures undertaken by the authorities are not sufficient yet. At the same time, measures taken by India on struggle against this kind of criminality are worthy and accumulated experience can be used other countries.

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