



Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister and Chair of the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Boyko Rashkov, and OSCE Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey, 24 June 2021, Sofia. (OSCE)

PRESS RELEASE

During visit to Bulgaria, OSCE Representative Richey praises attention to prevention while calling for strengthening commitment and fighting impunity

SOFIA, 24 June 2021 – Valiant Richey, OSCE Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, on the last day of his three-day official visit to Sofia, reported that Bulgaria has developed sound initiatives that focus its anti-trafficking efforts on prevention.

During the visit, Richey met with anti-trafficking stakeholders from throughout the country, including Deputy Prime Minister and Chair of the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Boyko Rashkov. Richey met high-level government officials from the Interior Ministry, the General Directorate for Organized Crime, the Justice Ministry, the Supreme Court of Cassation, the Supreme Prosecutor's Office of Cassation, the Foreign Affairs Ministry, the Labour and Social Policy Ministry, and the Commission for Anti-Corruption and Illegal Assets Forfeiture. He also met with members of civil society and the Ombudsman, and visited a shelter for adult victims of trafficking.

At a joint press briefing with Deputy Prime Minister Rashkov, Richey praised Bulgarian authorities for their focus on preventing the exploitation of Bulgarians abroad, a solid legal framework for combating human trafficking and an established track record in recovering proceeds from the crime. "Challenges that still remain are in implementation and the culture of impunity. Human trafficking is a serious crime, a

security threat and a grave violation of human rights. Traffickers must be held accountable for the harm they cause with punishments that reflect the gravity of the crime,” said Richey.

"The penalties in Bulgaria are quite liberal," said Deputy Prime Minister Rashkov. "We need to focus on sanctions because suspended sentences are often imposed. These punishments do not have the needed preventive effect on perpetrators." Rashkov added that suspended sentences are not helpful for victims' recovery and overcoming the psychological traumas; it deprives them of confidence and a sense of security.

Richey noted that better data collection is needed to help assess the scale of human trafficking and the impact of current anti-trafficking measures. "I hope this visit will also serve to foster additional political will to prioritize efforts and financial resources to enhance and sustain victim support services and facilitate the prosecution of traffickers."

The Special Representative conducts multiple country visits each year to help increase the capacity of OSCE participating States in addressing human trafficking, to share recommendations and collect best practices for fighting this heinous crime. A report detailing the findings of his visit will be released later in 2021.

For PDF attachments or links to sources of further information, please visit: <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/490988>

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