

Journey
16 October

Your Majesty, Your Excellencies, Mr Mayor, esteemed guests,

Yesterday marked ten years' existence of an independent rapporteur. Unfortunately, ten years of work in this field does not mean that the phenomenon is declining or disappearing. It is however becoming more visible.

Yesterday I presented my 8th report to the State Secretary of Security and Justice. The report covers the situation in the Netherlands during the last ten years and reviews my recommendations in that period. Human trafficking is, however, a worldwide problem, frequently involving cross-border organised crime, and flagrant breaches of the human rights of those individuals who are merely looking for a better life. There must be -and must continue to be - international attention to the macro-factors which constitute the source and breeding ground for cross-border human trafficking.

As rapporteur in the past years I have been able to contribute to stepping up the fight against human trafficking and improving the care for victims in the Dutch context. Much has indeed improved. Let me mention as an example the provisions for victims of human trafficking in legislation on aliens. Many recommendations in this field have been adopted and this had led to significant improvements to regulations and policy. I am happy about this.

But there is however a persistent problem with the help provided to under-aged victims, girls who are vulnerable, and therefore susceptible to the charms of attractive pimps or loverboys, as we call them. They include neglected girls, those with a slight mental handicap or other, sometimes, multiple problems

We need a vision on the assistance and care that the youth care services should provide to under-age victims. A national strategy for caring for this category of victims should have been formulated long ago, embracing key aspects such as a pedagogical climate, safety, small groups and education. It is unacceptable that a vision and strategy has not yet been developed in view of the many national under age victims encountered over the past decade.

I have a very clear idea of how we should help this group. They need to be protected and secure, and inaccessible to the human traffickers, in a setting where they cannot easily escape to rejoin their loverboy. But they should explicitly not end up in prison or detention. The need to be in small groups with fellow victims, where they will not be stigmatised and where those providing help and care know exactly what they have been through and how they should be approached. In an institution where any traumas and underlying problems can be diagnosed and from where they can be adequately referred on to the specific help they need. But help in a setting where people know about and pay attention to the ensuing criminal proceedings. At present, admission to a closed, integrated youth care facility often means an impediment to any further investigation. And that's not what we want. Human traffickers need to be prosecuted and punished.

I see four establishments, scattered throughout the country so that the girls can be taken out of their environment, weaned off their lover boys and where they cannot be found. In a pleasant, remote setting, protective, but not a prison. Where there is an educative climate with facilities like classes and help with their specific problems.

It is a project that is dear to my heart, as they say. I would have been very happy to see my recommendations on this point in particular given some follow-up.

Your Majesty, Your Excellencies, Mr Mayor, dear guests,

The reason we are here is to visit Journey.

Journey is made up of seven sea containers together telling the story of a victim of sexual exploitation. Each container has been designed by a different artist or artists and portrays one specific aspect of the victim's experience, representing the seven stages of the victim's story. As you walk through the containers, you can experience human trafficking.

The exhibition gives the general public a unique opportunity to learn about the nature and impact of human trafficking. But also potential victims (of loverboys for example), potential young offenders, as well as consumers, clients of prostitutes, and employers need to be more aware of the fact that human trafficking is here and now and on our doorstep. The exhibition is intended to spark a general discussion on human trafficking and to raise awareness.

We have brought Journey to the Netherlands to mark our tenth anniversary. And I am proud of the fact that after London, Vienna, New York and Madrid, Journey is now here, in the city of peace and justice.

I am very glad that Helen Bamber, Emma Thompson and Trevor Robinson, as founders and creators of Journey are here today to show us their unique installation.

And Now Your Majesty, with your permission, I would like to go outside and give you the opportunity to experience Journey.