



Inter-Parliamentary
Union

THE DECISIVE CONTRIBUTION OF PARLIAMENT TO THE FIGHT AGAINST CHILD TRAFFICKING IN BURKINA FASO

National seminar for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the National Assembly of Burkina Faso

Ouagadougou, 21-22 September 2010



National Assembly of
Burkina Faso

CONCLUSIONS

The national seminar on *The decisive contribution of parliaments to the fight against child trafficking in Burkina Faso* was held on 21 and 22 September 2010 in Ouagadougou. Jointly organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the National Assembly of Burkina Faso, this seminar served to follow up the Regional Conference in Cotonou, whose Declaration serves as a set of guidelines for parliamentary action to combat this scourge.

As a part of national activities for countries greatly affected by child trafficking, this seminar sought to examine the specificities of child trafficking in Burkina Faso with a view to identifying parliamentary action as a component of national mobilization to eradicate the problem.

Some 60 participants - members of parliament and parliamentary staff, representatives of the central government, local government, international organizations and civil society - took part in the event.

Following presentations to take stock of the situation, participants noted with concern that Burkina Faso was a country of origin, transit and destination. Children from Burkina Faso were sent to Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali and Nigeria. Trafficking plagued the entire country, and was predominant in the central-western region, the north and the east - an important cotton-growing area where child labour was employed - the Sahel, the Boucle du Mouhoun, the Hauts-Bassins et Cascades - particularly in the province of Comoé, which served as a transit zone to transfer children to Côte d'Ivoire. Burkina Faso was a party to the main regional and international treaties, including ILO Conventions 138 and 182 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which prohibits trafficking and sets out standards for child labour. After condemning the causes and consequences of the problem, which caused great distress to the victims of child trafficking, the participants lauded the concrete results that had been achieved by the major stakeholders, namely: the Ministry for Social Action and National Solidarity, the communes of Fada N'Gourma and Banfora and the national transport trade union of Burkina Faso in terms of prevention, protection, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims and cracking down on traffickers. Those results were the fruit of collaborative efforts that had brought about significant changes to the legislative and institutional frameworks in the past few years in Burkina Faso.

In spite of those significant results, however, the participants noted the enormous challenges that remained as a result of structural, administrative, institutional, financial and sociocultural difficulties.

In the Labour Code, several references were made to decrees and regulatory acts, many of which had not yet been passed although they should have been by virtue of the final provisions, which stipulate a six-month deadline from the date the Code is passed. Similarly, the institutions put in place to combat trafficking generally do not have sufficient resources. They receive assistance from technical and financial partners only. State intervention could serve to strengthen the functioning of such institutions.

These challenges are also linked to the definition of the status of transit centres for children who have been rescued from trafficking, the setting of an appropriate age for children to do light work in keeping with ILO standards, and the inconsistency of travel authorizations issued in the various countries affected by trafficking.

Several weaknesses were identified in terms of cracking down on traffickers and their accomplices, following up repatriated children who have been returned to their family, rehabilitation and socioeconomic and family reintegration and material and financial resources, not to mention the sociocultural pressures that thwart efforts aimed at eradicating trafficking.

Expressing their deep concern for the persistent nature of the problem that was methodically maintained by traffickers who defied established rules, the participants called for renewed interest in national mobilization spearheaded by parliament which, by representing all strata of society, was committed to defending their interests. To do that, they identified parliamentary action to help enhance the legal framework and consolidate interinstitutional collaboration.

Reaffirming their constitutional duties, the participants underscored that parliament should inspire and support initiatives aimed at improving the legal and institutional framework with a view to combating trafficking. That would imply a review of certain legal instruments, such as the 1976 decree on apprenticeship contracts and the 1964 Act governing the circulation of minors with a view to updating them and adapting them to the specificity of trafficking in Burkina Faso. That would serve to ensure better enforceability and easier enforcement both in terms of protecting the rights of children and cracking down on traffickers. These provisions, for which parliament must guarantee effective oversight and follow-up, have the advantage of making birth registration compulsory, thereby facilitating the issuance of birth certificates and the schooling of children.

The participants recommended that parliament ensure that the laws were widely disseminated by scaling up information and sensitization activities and better allocating financial resources. All of these mechanisms will help boost laws and spur parliaments in their efforts to combat child trafficking.

Recognizing that combating trafficking was possible only if needs were identified and actions assessed, the participants called for the establishment of a data collection system. Data on trafficking would be a valuable way of guiding the stakeholders in making political decisions, formulating technical strategies and allocating adequate resources, whose effectiveness and relevance were closely linked to reliable and available data.

Considering the ramifications of trafficking on both the internal and external levels, and re-evaluating strategies to combat the problem, which require joint and concerted action, the participants called for an inclusive approach. To that end, they appealed to all stakeholders involved - the executive, the judiciary, civil society, transport and craft unions and international organizations - to collaborate in drawing up and reviewing strategies and other measures aimed at eradicating trafficking.

The participants called for preliminary collaboration between the ministries with responsibility for child protection and justice, the parliamentary network and parliamentary committees for the protection of children and development partners. Such collaboration would no doubt lead to the successful passage and enforcement of a specific anti-trafficking law.

The participants also called for greater collaboration between the various countries concerned with a view to coordinating measures geared towards creating a hostile environment for traffickers and promoting the rights of children through targeted policies.

All of these recommendations were included in a plan of action, attached to the present conclusions, with an implementation deadline. A follow-up committee was established.

The participants reiterated their sincere gratitude to the National Assembly, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and all the partners who had helped make the event a success.

Done in Ouagadougou on 22 September 2010

The Seminar