

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would first like to begin by acknowledging the support Mission 89 has received in its work, and in hosting this event from MEP Bogdan Wenta, The Right Honourable Baroness Young of Hornsey, Mr. Mohamed Amersi of the Amersi Foundation, and the Oak Foundation.

This event would not have been possible without you. Thank you.

I Would like to continue by saying that the new global agenda is about raising voices, acting and enabling implementation. This is what Mission 89 is all about.

We are all here today, giving generously of our time because we understand the positive impact that the sporting world can have on issues of human rights and social justice.

On the flip side, the intersection of sport and human trafficking are two fields that are not always discussed side by side, and so it is only fitting that in the week that marks the 11th EU Anti-Trafficking Day, we come together to discuss a rather complex and complicated phenomena.

So, trafficking in sport: is it a sports issue, a migration issue, an economic issue? Or is it a political issue, a local issue? A global issue? Or maybe it's a question of Law Enforcement, or a lack thereof?

For a subject so complex the answer is actually simple: it is each and all of these.

We need to agree today that trafficking in sport is an economic activity, that is facilitated by individual criminals and groups using loopholes in international regulations to build a strong economic model. It is therefore important that trafficking is recognized as a mature and developed business model. After this awareness raising cannot!

One point stands out, and I'd like it to be one of the takeaways from this event, is that the exploitation of children, be it for trade, migratory reasons, or trafficking, is the gravest violation of human rights.

That the pretense of a professional career in sport is being used to recruit young children into an underworld of illegal immigration and crime should be a concern for all of us. Because beyond the glimmer and the gold that we see represented in elite sport, there is a trail of exploitation that follows children that want to pursue a career in sport.

Children and their families are being ensnared by the empty promises of agents and trafficking networks who promise a better life and an escape route from poverty.

And therefore does it really matter the exact number of victims, when we know it to be a FACT that youth are being exploited and taken advantage because of their passion for sport, because of their vulnerability as a result of poverty, lack of education, lack of information, lack awareness of what constitutes a legitimate approach, because of weak judicial systems, because of the way this issue is portrayed by media?

Recently, Baroness Young and I met with an English Premier League Club, and the question from the club executive was, "OK, so what can we do about this?"

This was an engaged club, and this was a very good question. Part of the answer is that everyone in this room is in a position of power to contribute to changing this situation.

So tangibly, what can sports stakeholders do that are involved in the development and transfer of athletes do? We would recommend a risk assessment of their operations to identify risks, opportunities and priorities for action against child trafficking and then to move forward towards develop a clear and operational policy that explicitly prohibits child trafficking.

Institutionally, we say that the EU political agenda should not ignore the importance of trafficking in sport, and its dramatic impact due to Europe's attractiveness for youth athletes. This gives a responsibility to re-open discussion inside the Parliament for this subject to be debated until a structured and sustainable solution can be proposed.

Finally, it goes without saying that while the issue of child trafficking in sport will not be solved, here in Brussels tonight, we can already consider a multi-stakeholder action plan, that will connect the main actors here today. And

so, I would like to propose that an international working group be created, to bring together legitimate shareholders under the guidance of the EU and this International Task Force against trafficking in Sport could be coordinated by M89.

Mission 89 is the only NGO addressing this issue. We are solution-oriented and we see ourselves as facilitators of a process that involves Research, Education, and Advocacy. We bring together the key players and connect the dots because multi-stakeholder problems require multi-stakeholder solutions.

We are also on the ground with live projects and that's where we believe a difference can be made. Aside from our collaboration with the African Union, we have partnered with other NGOs to deliver workshops and training and are currently in the process of conceptualization of a Child Rights & Anti Trafficking Education Mobile App, which will inform and educate on trafficking in sport, provide Life Skills and Vocational Skills training modules to empower youth with life and employability skills. We have also recently launched pilot programmes of our #Notinourgame Anti-trafficking Awareness Raising Campaign in Nigeria and Kenya and later this month we will have one at a local club in Genoa, Italy.

The question I would like to leave you with is what can you do? What is your organization doing now or what can you be doing tomorrow? This is a complex issue but complex issues should not go unchallenged.

Today, in this short time, we hope to gain a fundamental and proper understanding of the problem and, with that, a clear commitment to its elimination using the power of our respective organizations.

You have the power to make a difference. You can agree it is time for Europe to stand against child trafficking in sport.

You can say #notinourgame.

Thank you.