



“Listening to Victims of Child Sex Trafficking”
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Rep. Chris Smith, Chairman
October 4, 2012

Good afternoon, and welcome to our briefing on listening to victims of child sex trafficking. The sex trafficking and abuse of children is one of the most despicable, violent crimes on earth – shattering the lives of the victims and their families – a crime from which the victims cannot recover, or only rarely and with great difficulty.

The traffickers and abusers rely on their ability to frighten a child into silence or the reluctance of adults to listen when children speak. They also use their own reputations, standing, or power in the community to prevent allegations from being properly considered and investigated.

As we have seen recently in the tragic Sandusky child sex abuse case at the Pennsylvania State, many sexually abused children do not find a way to speak until they are adults. But when they do so, and are heard, others find the courage to come forward—putting the traffickers and abusers behind bars and bringing an end to the cycle of broken lives.

It is imperative that the justice system be ready to listen to allegations and to thoroughly investigate allegations no matter when they are raised—and no matter who is accused.

This year’s Trafficking in Persons Report noted that, although the law in the Netherlands prescribes maximum sentences ranging from 8 to 18 years imprisonment for individuals convicted of human trafficking—and that these penalties are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes such as rape—the laws are not being enforced.

According to the report, “the average sentences imposed on convicted traffickers continued to be less than two years”—21 months to be exact. Twenty-one months for destroying a woman’s soul and body in the enslavement in the brothel! Nine convicted trafficking offenders received community service or a fine as punishment.

The leader of a major Turkish-German human trafficking organization, was sentenced to 7 years and 9 months imprisonment for having forced at least 120 women into prostitution—that is just over one month in jail for every life he destroyed. And, by the way, the court let him out on bail and, no surprise, he fled to Turkey, so he is currently not even serving the tiny sentence he received. It leaves me speechless. What is going on here? Do the courts in the Netherlands take human trafficking seriously?

This afternoon we are going to consider how and to what extent allegations of trafficking and abuse should be investigated. We’ll do so in the context of a particular series of cases, in which very, very serious allegations have been raised against the Secretary General at the Ministry of Justice in the Netherlands, Mr. Joris Demmink. Mr. Demmink has been accused by a witness that will present today of sexually abusing and raping the witness when the witness was being trafficked in a brothel in Amsterdam at the age of 15. The investigation

into these accusations was suddenly and inexplicably halted, and law enforcement officials involved were allegedly sworn to secrecy.

Mr. Demmink has also been accused by two Turkish boys, now adults, of having raped them in Turkey between 1994 and 2003. At the time, the boys were 11 and 14, at least one of whom was homeless and trusted the Turkish police officer who brought him to Mr. Demmink. The other was allegedly locked in a hotel bedroom with Mr. Demmink, who assaulted him sexually.

The allegations are shocking and horrible. Mr. Demmink has a right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law, and that is a sacred right that I'm sure we all want to protect. At the same time, the allegations, when taken in their full context, are credible, and deserve to be properly investigated so that a prosecutor can make a responsible decision whether to proceed with a case against Mr. Demmink. That investigation has never happened – the investigations that have taken place have been a travesty, and have done nothing to clear Mr. Demmink's name. Rather they have raised further questions.

Yesterday, the Netherlands' Minister of Security and Justice, Mr. Opstelten, wrote to the Dutch parliament regarding this case and listing the actions taken by the Justice system in regards to the allegations against Mr. Demmink. The letter states "the nature of [Mr. Demmink's] job warrants a degree of vigilance."

I could not agree more.

The fact that Mr. Demmink is the Secretary General of the Ministry of Justice, the very entity responsible to investigate the charges against him, should mean that the investigation into the allegations was one of the most thorough, transparent, and well-documented investigations ever undertaken by the Netherlands. Not only are those making the allegations literally taking on the Dutch justice system in the person of one of its top officials, but the reputation of the Ministry of Justice itself is on the line.

Sadly, the investigation was anything but thorough, transparent, or well-documented. The very serious allegations were never given the courtesy of a criminal investigation—apparently because Mr. Demmink claims, and the Dutch cannot disprove with their own records, that Mr. Demmink was not in Turkey in the 1990s.

Over and over again, the Dutch Justice Minister's letter to the Dutch parliament states that there was "no cause to launch a criminal investigation." With all due respect to Dutch Justice Minister, this is a tacit admission that a thorough investigation has never been undertaken.

It makes the Dutch Justice Ministry look like an ostrich with its head in the sand.

The Dutch government freely admits that it has never so much as interviewed one of the two alleged victims pressing charges, Mustafa. And a third victim, who has now come forward, Yacine, has also never been interviewed.

Moreover, the Dutch investigation into whether there should be a real criminal investigation never interviewed the Turkish policeman, Mehmet Korkmaz, who admits that in the 1990s he abducted boys for Mr. Demmink to sexually assault.

Nor did the Dutch investigation speak to the former Chief of Police of Istanbul, Necdet Menzir, who also contradicts Mr. Demmink and states that Mr. Demmink was in Turkey in the 1990s and that his officers were assigned to protect him.

Nor did the Dutch investigation into whether there should be a criminal investigation speak to Huseyin Celebi, the senior Turkish intelligence official who, in 2006, wrote a report on Mr. Demmink's travel to and nefarious activities in Turkey during the 1990s and early 2000s. And who also says that Mr. Demmink used aliases to enter and exit Turkey.

I live and work a long way from the Netherlands and do not claim expertise in the details of the Dutch justice system—but from my vantage point, I have to ask: How can a preliminary investigation not interview the victims or key witnesses, and then claim there is nothing to investigate?

Whether or not Mr. Demmink is guilty of the allegations against him we cannot say, but I will state my strong belief that the allegations against him will not be resolved without an actual—thorough—criminal investigation into the allegations raised by the victims and supported by the Turkish government officials.

The Netherlands owes this to the boys who may have been grievously harmed by Mr. Demmink. And the Netherlands owes this to Mr. Demmink himself, whose name has been dogged by abruptly halted and grossly incomplete investigations for over a decade. Mr. Demmink maintains his innocence – if he is innocent, he should want this investigation to go forward, so as to clear his name. I appeal to him to state publicly his own request that an investigation be conducted.