

## Press Release

### Conference on “The 4 Ps: Protection, Prevention, Prosecution and Partnership: Europe against violence against women and sexual exploitation”

**Budapest, November 15th, 2024**

Organized jointly by the Hungarian Women’s Lobby and the Department of Social Work and Social Sciences at the Jewish Theological Seminary - University of Jewish Studies (OR-ZSE), this conference on November 12, Social Work Day, addressed the social and legal issues surrounding prostitution, violence against women, and sexual exploitation. The event, supported by the 8th District Municipality of Budapest and hosted by OR-ZSE, aimed to enhance effective cross-sectoral collaboration. The opening remarks were delivered by leaders of the organizing and hosting organizations, alongside Mayor András Pikó of Józsefváros and Deputy Mayor Tessza Udvarhelyi, all underscoring the importance of societal solidarity in combating sexual exploitation.

It was a great honour that the keynote address was delivered by Reem Alsalem, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences. She provided a comprehensive overview of the links between prostitution and violence against women, emphasizing that prostitution is a system of severe violence that infringes upon women’s fundamental human rights, including safety, dignity, and equality. She highlighted the recurring physical and mental abuse faced by women in prostitution, who are often victims of sexual violence, blackmail, and trafficking, resulting in long-term harm.

The independent rapporteur underscored that international law explicitly mandates that states take action against the sexual exploitation of women and girls including of prostitution, and must take actions to discourage the purchasing of sexual acts, often referred to by women in prostitution as “paid rape.” Her presentation also addressed the problematic use of the term “sex work,” which can be seen as a euphemism concealing the brutal reality of prostitution and it being a system of exploitation and abuse. According to Alsalem, the “Equality Model” represents the most effective response, as it places criminal responsibility on buyers for buying sexual acts thereby discouraging demand, while treating prostituted persons as victims, decriminalizing victims, facilitating exit and rehabilitation for survivors of prostitution as well as awareness and education campaigns on the harms of buying sexual acts with the purpose of abolishing this practice.

Ágnes Kövér-Van Til (ELTE) emphasized the structural violence and societal trauma inherent in prostitution, which has long-lasting effects on communities. She pointed out that

patriarchal structures and institutionalized violence sustain the systems of prostitution and trafficking. The role of civil society in public education and the dismantling of stereotypes was highlighted as essential to combating these issues.

During the roundtable discussion, experts including Lieutenant Colonel Ildikó Barabás (Ministry of the Interior), Zoltán Háberman (OR-ZSE), Ágnes Martony (Solwodi Hungary Association), Márta Schermann (Faktor Terminal Association), and Dr. Szandra Windt (OKRI) analyzed various aspects of law enforcement and victim support. Participants agreed that while there has been progress in implementing the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive, public awareness remains insufficient, highlighting the need for ongoing education of the general population. They emphasized that cooperation between civil society and religious organizations, along with an integrated approach to prevention and law enforcement, can greatly enhance efforts to combat sexual exploitation.

In the afternoon, roundtable discussions included representatives from various professions as well as students. These discussions offered a particularly valuable opportunity to explore the conference's four main topics – prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership – in depth, facilitated by experts and based on real-life case studies. Each topic allowed participants to gain a deeper understanding of the professional tasks and possible directions for collaboration. The roundtables provided numerous insights, emphasizing the importance of education and public awareness, the need for personalized victim protection, and the strengthening of cooperation between victims, professionals involved in these cases, and relevant institutions.

The Hungarian Women's Lobby believes that the conference has successfully fulfilled its aim to revive and enrich the professional and policy discourse on sexual exploitation and violence against women, including in the context of prostitution. Events like these seem essential for strengthening social solidarity and cooperation, offering professionals an opportunity for open exchange, partnership development, and a deeper focus on a victim-centered approach.

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