

Telraam (abacus) action (Achterdam) 2013

The Municipality of Alkmaar, Public Prosecutor's Office and police launched an integral action on 15 March 2013 to combat human trafficking. The Achterdam, a street with window prostitution, was closed to the public at 9:30 pm. The prostitutes working at the time were transported by the police to the municipal office building, where detectives specializing in sexual offences and human trafficking interviewed them in order to determine whether any of them were victims of human trafficking. Most of the women originated from Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. No under-age minors were among them. The interviews yielded a considerable amount of useful information, on the basis of which further investigations will be conducted. The women responded positively to the talks with the police. They appreciated the attention to their position as possible victims of human trafficking and exploitation. The women were assisted by interpreters, lawyers and assistance organizations. The police and officials of the Municipality of Alkmaar also inspected the prostitution buildings for compliance with permit requirements, fire safety and public health. The men present in the area at the time were registered and only released after an extensive interview. The goal was to determine whether they played any role in the exploitation of prostitutes.

More than 500 employees of the Municipality of Alkmaar, Public Prosecutor's Office and the police were involved in the action. The Achterdam remained closed the rest of the night. The initial goal of the action on Achterdam was to reduce and suppress human trafficking. Inspections of the prostitution buildings are also conducted regularly. The municipality has closed the window establishments in the past, but continues to devote attention to combating prostitution-related crime and nuisance. Mayor Bruinooge feels very strongly about combatting abuses on Achterdam and is part of the national Human Trafficking Taskforce.

As a result of various investigations into human trafficking on Achterdam, two suspects were taken into custody that night, one Romanian on the authority of the National Public Prosecutor's Office and one Hungarian on the authority of the Noord-Holland Public Prosecutor's Office. The Hungarian suspect emerged as a suspect in the exploitation of a prostitute in an investigation by the police and Public Prosecutor's Office in Noord-Holland. During the Telraam action, one other victim contacted the police. The men are still in custody.

In addition to the investigations already in progress under the direction of the Noord-Holland Public Prosecutor's Office, additional signs of human trafficking emerged during the action. Various investigations were initiated in response, both criminal (police and Public Prosecutor's Office) and administrative (municipality). No statements can be made regarding these at this time. However, the Mayor of Alkmaar, Piet Bruinooge, has announced that he will propose to the City Council to tighten up the regulations if the investigations show this to be necessary.

Human trafficking is a modern form of slavery. It is a crime that is a very serious offence against human dignity and gravely violates the physical and emotional integrity of its victims. It is a crime that is committed around the world and to which no country is immune. Millions of victims are exploited by human traffickers every year. The prostitution industry is extremely susceptible to human trafficking. Human trafficking also takes place in the regulated prostitution sector. In recent years, various criminal investigations have exposed serious abuses in this industry.

In the Netherlands, combatting human trafficking is a top priority of the government agencies and public administrative agencies involved. The seriousness of the crime makes it absolutely urgent to combat this problem. Similar actions took place on Doubletstraat in The Hague and the Baekelandplein square in Eindhoven in 2011 and 2012. These actions resulted in the closure of various prostitution buildings and the criminal prosecution of human traffickers.

In addition to these actions in the prostitution sector, numerous interventions have also taken place in recent years to uncover exploitation in other areas, including the agricultural and horticultural sectors and among fraudulent employment agencies.