

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

25th Session

Joint Statement

Mr. President,

This is a statement on behalf of Germany, Austria, Cote d'Ivoire, Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States.

We would like to draw the attention of the Human Rights Council to the alarming increase of activities of criminal networks in North and East Africa. Since 2008, reports about kidnappings, torture, extortion, human trafficking, and physical and sexual abuse of African migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and Sudan, and recently in Libya have multiplied. Victims of trafficking are mainly Eritreans, often minors, transiting Ethiopia, Sudan, Libya and Egypt aiming for Europe, Israel or other countries. The majority are reportedly forcibly abducted to Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and tortured for ransom by their traffickers. There is abundant evidence of these victims being subject to exploitation and violence, including sexual violence, in a most brutal, frequent and systematic way. Many victims die at the hands of their abusers. Those surviving risk being charged on violation of migration laws, when apprehended by the authorities of the states concerned.

While instruments to address this situation – both at national and international level – are in place, they are not sufficiently implemented or enforced.

Among the countries concerned by this phenomenon, not all have acknowledged or addressed the situation appropriately. Sudan has undertaken national efforts, including in cooperation with the UNHCR and the IOM, to address these crimes; a number of suspects have been tried and sentenced. (And in cooperation with the UNHCR, Sudan has issued 30,000 work and resident permits to Eritrean refugees there). Similarly, Ethiopia has also taken significant efforts to crack down on human trafficking and smuggling.

The exploitation, trafficking, abuse and the kidnapping has, however, not stopped.

Recognizing the local challenges faced by their authorities, we therefore urge all countries concerned to launch a concerted effort to identify, and to investigate the alleged involvement of officials, and to hold accountable all persons involved in these horrendous crimes.

We call on all countries concerned to increase their vigilance, renew and strengthen their efforts in line with relevant national legislation and their National Plan of Action on combatting human trafficking.

We appeal to all states concerned to join us for a policy of prevention, protection against and prosecution of human trafficking.

We further urge the countries concerned to stop detaining victims of these criminal networks, including of human trafficking, and to grant them the assistance, protection and post-trauma treatment to which they are entitled under national and international law and to allow them to register with UNHCR should they wish to claim asylum.

Finally, we also encourage all relevant international organizations, especially the African Union and the League of Arab States as well as the UN, in particular UNODC, IOM, UNHCR, and OHCHR to take all necessary steps in their power and within their respective mandates, including to monitor and to report on the situation, in order to stop and prevent human trafficking in North Eastern Africa and provide needed assistance to the victims.

We particularly encourage the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, to follow those developments to inform the Human Rights Council on these developments.