

Trafficking in Persons in Conflict Situations

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Mr. President,

Human trafficking is not always the first thing that comes to mind when we think about violent conflicts. Often our news stories and our attention spans are consumed with images of bombings, tanks and refugee camps. But the link between trafficking and conflict is a major issue in need of our attention.

Last December's Presidential Statement on Trafficking in Persons in Situations of Conflict was an important achievement. First, it reaffirmed that human trafficking must be considered in the context of threats to international peace and security. Second, it asserted a role for the UN Security Council in consolidating the international response to this challenge.

We thank Spain for organising this important debate and we align ourselves with the statement delivered by the European Union.

In my national capacity, Mr. President, I will outline four areas of opportunity for a stronger international response to trafficking in conflict.

One, the pursuit of accountability for conflict-related sexual violence.

The link between human trafficking and conflict-related sexual violence is irrefutable. We've seen this in horrific cases involving the trafficking and sexual abuse of women by ISIL and Boko Haram. There are also less reported cases, for example, the sexual exploitation by illegal traffickers of those who are fleeing war zones.

In addition to being linked through causes, or points of origin, there are more invidious links; ones that we can do something about. One is accountability, or the lack thereof. A clear thread exists between conflict-related sexual violence and human trafficking because impunity for one allows the other to flourish.

The UN Security Council can act as an important accountability mechanism in this respect.

At its most simple, let us have incidents of trafficking called out in this chamber where we see them occurring. In addition, the Council can serve to bolster other accountability measures by for example supporting Special Representative Bangura, by active deployment of women

protection advisers in peacekeeping missions, by referring cases to the International Criminal Court, and by supporting regional and national systems of accountability.

Two, preventing the conditions conducive to human trafficking.

Mr. President,

We have seen clearly that war acts as a potent catalyst to human trafficking. It breaks down institutional and social protections. And it leaves masses of people vulnerable to traffickers. It is startlingly obvious therefore that greater focus by the international community on preventing conflicts, and stopping their reoccurrence, will have a direct impact on human trafficking. Prevent the conflict and you prevent the trafficking.

We call for increased momentum in putting our words about conflict prevention and peacebuilding – often heard in this chamber – into practice. We welcome a stronger role for the Peacebuilding Commission and regional institutions in informing the Security Council about human trafficking in conflict situations. And we look to the Secretary General-Designate to maximise his good offices in advancing conflict prevention.

Three, partnerships that extend beyond the Security Council.

Trafficking has mobility at its core. It transcends borders and jurisdictions. It presents far too big a challenge for any one entity to confront.

Although the issue of human trafficking in conflict should indeed be addressed by the Security Council, we will also need to look beyond this chamber to find a comprehensive solution. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals will be crucial in this regard. This will mean a focus not only on Target 8.7, which addresses modern slavery and human trafficking directly, but also on Goal 5, to ensure women's empowerment, and Goal 16 to prioritise the building of strong and inclusive institutions.

To achieve this, partnerships must be fostered between the UN and regional systems, many of which have developed comprehensive strategies on this issue. For example, as Member States

work to implement the Palermo Protocols and the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants they will play a crucial role in comprehensively addressing human trafficking.

Trafficking is an egregious violation of people's human rights and we are encouraged that the UN's human rights bodies are taking an increasingly comprehensive approach to human trafficking.

Finally, Mr. President, a stronger response needs to place the needs of the most vulnerable at its core.

Through our support to Justice Rapid Response and UN Women, we heard last year harrowing accounts of investigations into sexual violence and human trafficking by Boko Haram. Many victims were too traumatised to speak to interviewers about their ordeals. In some cases, they were more concerned about shelter, food or their own personal safety, than the investigation. For them, justice meant more than a prison sentence for their abusers.

Uncomfortable though it may be, we need to hear these accounts. We need the participation of those who have survived or who are most vulnerable to human trafficking in conflict. And in crafting our response, we need to put them in the centre. This applies in particular to women, but also to young people, including former child combatants. The participation of civil society, academia and the private sector will also be crucial in stemming flows of human traffic.

Mr. President, we are grateful to Spain for working to ensure that the Council remains focused on this issue. However, as we have noted, our response must include - and also extend beyond - the Security Council if we are to finally end human trafficking in conflict.