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CEDAW half-day of general discussion on “trafficking of women and girls in the context of global migration”

Seventy-second Session



Opening Statement

Youla Haddadin, OHCHR Senior Advisor on Trafficking in Persons

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

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*Madam Chair,*

*Excellencies,*

*Distinguished members of the Committee,*

*Distinguished panellists,*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

It gives me great pleasure to be with you today for this half-day general discussion on “Trafficking of women and girls in the context of global migration”.

This event comes at an opportune time when the international community has concluded several important policy documents; the adoption of the Political declaration after the appraisal of the global plan of action to combat trafficking in persons in 2017; the New York Declaration in September 2016, and most recently the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 19 December 2018, and the Global Compact for Refugees, adopted on 17 December 2018.

The adoption of Agenda 2030 and SDGs provide another authoritative tool, where several goals and targets are aimed to address trafficking directly or through addressing root causes that create vulnerabilities. Target 5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals recognizes trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation as form of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres.

Target 8.7 on ending modern slavery and human trafficking reflects the important link between migration and trafficking.

Madam Chair, Ladies and gentlemen,

 On 29 January this year, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime launched its latest Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, which shows that more victims of trafficking in persons are detected across the world.

According to the report, the increased number of detected victims can reflect positive and negative developments in the fight against trafficking in persons, as it can be an indicator of a larger trafficking problem, or due to enhanced efforts by authorities through adopting effective legal, policy and institutional frameworks, which have clearly contributed to improving the identification of victims and the effectiveness of justice responses.

Another important observation in the report is the higher number of convictions documented. However, low levels of victim detections and trafficker convictions were recorded in some parts of the world, showing that more needs to be done. The report also revealed that 49% of victims were women, while girls counted %23, boys were %7.

*Madam Chair,*

*Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,*

The lack of access to regular migration channels and to full and reliable information about these channels and terms and conditions of work, restrictions on movement and lack of economic opportunities, often push individuals including women to **resort to irregular migration**, which exposes them to particular risks and dangers. Moreover, women with irregular migration status are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence and abuse.

The failure to identify victims of trafficking amongst irregular migrants, exposes many migrant women and girls to further violations, including unlawful and arbitrary detention. Moreover, in many cases women and girls are not detained separately from men. This exposes them to additional risks of physical and sexual violence.

It should be noted that the failure to recognize and value domestic and care work has perpetuated the demand for women migrant workers. Women and girls in such situations are largely concentrated in informal sectors of employment where legal protection of their labour rights is absent or limited and the risk of trafficking and exploitation is higher.

Furthermore, Forced displacement of people during conflicts and the Lack of access to safe and regular migration options forces many persons including women and girls, fleeing conflict to use irregular routes, often times increasing their vulnerability to exploitation, including trafficking. Displacement causes added vulnerability to exploitation of women and girls living in refugee camps.

*Madam Chair,*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

The main purposes for which women and girls are trafficked are indicative of the **gendered-nature of trafficking;** In 2016, 83% of women and 72% of girls were trafficked for sexual exploitation. Women are exposed to heightened risks of trafficking in situations of disaster and conflict-related displacement, including child marriage when fleeing humanitarian crises, sexual exploitation in refugee camps, temporary reception centres and informal settlement, including by peacekeepers, and forced recruitment or abduction by armed groups to undertake auxiliary tasks that involve sexual exploitation and abuse.

Moreover, new and emerging forms of trafficking such as recruitment of women who are forced to sell their babies or give them up for adoption, and the exploitation of migrant women in situations of debt bondage, including domestic servitude, reinforce this gender dimension.

Trafficking and other forms of exploitation has been perpetrated by armed groups; the abduction of women and girls by terrorist groups for purposes of forced marriage, forced pregnancy, sexual slavery, domestic servitude, and forced combatants including as suicide bombers. Documented cases include the kidnapping of 200 schoolgirls by Boko Haram (Nigeria); the capture of Yazidi women and girls by the so-called Islamic state (ISIL) (Iraq); girls abducted by Al-Shabaab, Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama‘a and soldiers of the National Army (Somalia) and by groups pledging alliance to ISIL (Libya).

*Madam Chair,*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

Article 6 of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women obliges States parties to take all appropriate measures to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women, while other articles are focused on addressing root causes and contributing factors that render women and girls vulnerable to trafficking, such as violence against women and discrimination. A human rights approach is very much directed to addressing the root causes, informed by general recommendations adopted by the committee.

The General Recommendation that the Committee will soon embark on elaborating will be important in uncovering the root causes of women’s and girls’ increased risk to trafficking in the context of migration, the thing that will assist all stakeholders in better responding.

During today’s consultation, the Committee begins the process of exchanging views and ideas with all stakeholders in order to draft an authoritative document that that will guide the international community on effective measures to combat trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration.

 I understand that the Committee is planning to examine regional specificities through regional consultations in Africa, Europe, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East, in the course of this year and next year.

*Madame Chair,*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

In conclusion, I wish to express the continued support of OHCHR to this initiative , and I look forward to the discussions today.

Thank you.

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