Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

**Half-day general discussion on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration**

**Palais des Nations in Geneva, Conference Room XVI** - Friday, **22 February 2019 from 10:00am - 1:00pm**

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Chairperson,

Distinguished delegates,

UNHCR welcomes the opportunity to engage in efforts to address the trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration and thanks the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women for the opportunity to present.

UNHCR affirms the Committee’s statement that asylum-seekers, refugees, internally displaced women, stateless women and women forcibly returned to their country of origin are groups highly vulnerable to trafficking. We are increasingly witnessing an intersection between trafficking in persons, forced displacement and refugee protection. The number of people who have been forcibly displaced has risen to more than 68.5 million; 85% of whom live in developing countries. The implications of this growing phenomenon upon vulnerabilities to and incidences of human trafficking are far-reaching, particularly for women and girls:

Firstly, *survivors of trafficking can become refugees*, fearing return to their countries of origin due to threats by traffickers and criminal gangs made against them and their families. They may be stigmatized and targeted within their own communities, particularly when they have been subjected to sexual exploitation. They can also face reprisals by traffickers within their host countries, requiring urgent resettlement to third countries.

Secondly, *refugees and IDPs fleeing conflict and violence may, in addition, become victims of trafficking in transit or at destination.* When large numbers of people are displaced, living with considerable physical insecurity and limited access to protection and assistance, the risks of human trafficking are exacerbated, especially for single women and unaccompanied or separated children.

Trafficking in persons thrives on restrictive border and asylum policies. The more our borders are closed, the riskier and more clandestine attempts by refugees to reach safety become. The absence of viable alternatives to accessing protection means that people on the move have no recourse other than to entrust their lives to smugglers or fall prey to traffickers, with all of the extreme risks that this entails.

At the same time, we have too often seen that asylum seekers and refugees are not identified as victims of trafficking and are excluded from national anti-trafficking services. Concurrently, victims of trafficking in need of international protection are often unaware of, and uninformed about, their right to apply for asylum. To better protect survivors of trafficking who become refugees, UNHCR has issued guidelines for States on the determination of their refugee status. However, they need to be accompanied by effective identification and referral mechanisms between governmental authorities. To this effect, UNHCR joins the Committee in calling on States to establish adequate screening mechanisms for the early identification of women and girl asylum seekers with specific protection and assistance needs, and to ensure that border and other personnel are able to conduct appropriate vulnerability assessments to identify victims of trafficking.

UNHCR will continue working closely with the Committee to ensure that States:

* + Make international protection available to victims of trafficking who require it;
  + Link national procedures and referral systems for protecting victims of trafficking, children, and asylum-seekers to ensure that the best available assistance and solutions are found in every case;
  + Provide child-friendly, gender-sensitive information on how to report trafficking and how to apply for asylum;
  + Provide effective protection and assistance in countries of asylum, including access to livelihoods, so that refugees are not motivated to move onward, potentially resorting to smugglers or traffickers; and
  + Affirm commitment to ending statelessness by 2025, which will eliminate an important reason for displacement as well as a source of vulnerability to human trafficking.

I Thank you.