WHO oral statement during the discussion on the CEDAW General Recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration

February 2019

* Thank you, committee members, and thank you madam chair for giving WHO the floor.
* The World Health Organization is honoured to be able to contribute to the development of this important general recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration.
* WHO would like to highlight the importance of a holistic approach to combatting trafficking in women and girls and encourages the CEDAW General Recommendation to take a comprehensive approach and include prevention measures as well as support systems and services that uphold the human rights of victims and survivors of trafficking.
* WHO would like to emphasize the importance of not conflating trafficking for sexual exploitation with sex work. Anti-trafficking laws that assume that all or most sex workers have been trafficked may both undermine efforts to stop trafficking and likewise negatively impact sex workers. In countries where laws, policies, discriminatory practices and stigmatizing attitudes drive sex work underground, access to health and other services by sex workers may be impeded.
* WHO supports a survivor-centred approach that gives primacy to the health needs and human rights of victims and survivors of trafficking. Mandatory reporting laws may discourage women from disclosing information and seeking the care they need whether during the trafficking experience or after – therefore rather than mandating health providers to report this to the police, they should be encouraged to respect the survivor’s autonomy and decision-making in this and all aspects of care.
* The health sector has an important role to play in preventing and responding to human trafficking. Human trafficking has severe physical, sexual and mental health consequences and the right to health needs to be upheld, including for those who are in a trafficking situation or who have experienced trafficking.
  + Given that health care providers may be the sole, or first, professionals to meet those who are in a trafficking situation, the health system has a responsibility and opportunity to identify survivors and ensure access to confidential, non-judgmental, quality services and, where wanted and needed, to connect them to other services.
  + WHO guidelines and protocols on how the health system should respond to women and girls subjected to gender-based violence, are based on a survivor-centred and human rights approach; they are also relevant when providing care for those who have been trafficked and should guide the services provided to those in or after trafficking situations.
* Recognizing human trafficking as a public health problem, a human rights violation and a symptom of gender-based discrimination and including the health sector in anti-trafficking policy would be an important step towards strengthening prevention and response.
* Human rights accountability to victims and survivors of trafficking requires a whole-of-government approach, including promoting prevention strategies, access to quality support services, and a strong intersectoral response.