Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to start by conveying my profound gratitude to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) for their exceptional and unwavering efforts in combating the insidious crime of human trafficking, which remains a pervasive issue affecting all segments of our societies today.

I express my thanks for their dedication to ensuring that their efforts in combating these crimes are inclusive across all sectors, leaving no one behind. I also offer my appreciation for their consistent organization of this esteemed global conference over the past 24 years, serving as a cornerstone for collaboration and knowledge exchange in the realm of combating human trafficking.

The significant scarcity of detailed data regarding disabilities and human trafficking, undoubtedly reflects on the sensitivity of national preventative strategies against human trafficking, particularly concerning the protection of persons with disabilities from such crime. Women and children with disabilities still face unique challenges and heightened risks in the context of human trafficking, necessitating targeted interventions and specialized protection measures to safeguard their rights and well-being effectively. Specifically, when persons with disabilities are living in poverty it makes them vulnerable to begging, trafficking, and abuse, and also when protection policies lack a disability perspective.

The UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime supplementary protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons especially women and children, The Palermo Protocol emphasizes in its preamble the obligation of States to take effective measures to prevent and combat human trafficking, especially concerning women and children. This necessitates adopting a comprehensive international approach in countries of origin, transit, and destination, including measures to prevent trafficking, prosecute traffickers, and protect victims through means such as safeguarding their internationally recognized human rights, with particular attention to the vulnerabilities of women and children with disabilities. Trafficking risks for women with disabilities and online violence need to be addressed with tailored prevention strategies and accessible awareness campaigns nationwide.

Furthermore, The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted to protect individuals with disabilities from different types of discrimination, exploitation and abuse to ensure human dignity, and provide justice for abused victims especially women and girls with disabilities as stated in the preamble, art. 3, art. 5, art. 11 and Article 16, where it obligates the State parties to “take all appropriate measures to promote the physical, cognitive and psychological recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration of persons with disabilities who become victims of any form of exploitation, violence or abuse, including through the provision of protection services.”

Although both conventions together provide a strong framework, implementation at national levels is not very efficient.

In light of the aforementioned, it has become vital to address the question: How should countries consider the diversity of disabilities when formulating preventative strategies against human trafficking? strategies, laws and policies should be targeted to the different categories who are targets of trafficking especially persons with disabilities.

The inclusion of women and children with disabilities in the discourse on human trafficking prevention strategies is vital (their voices and experiences should be heard) when developing these strategies. Therefore, when formulating anti-trafficking measures, countries must consider the diverse range of disabilities to ensure that no individual is overlooked or marginalized in these efforts. Tailored initiatives and support systems should be put in place to address the specific vulnerabilities and challenges faced by women and children with disabilities, recognizing their unique needs and ensuring their comprehensive protection from exploitative practices, forced labor, and trafficking.

When elaborating on this crucial matter, it is essential to delve into the three levels stipulated in the Palermo Protocol for combating human trafficking: prevention as the first level, punishment of traffickers as the second level, and protection of trafficking victims as the third level, it is imperative to integrate disability-inclusive perspectives at each level, promoting disability rights, including ratifying the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Prevention strategies should be designed to address the distinct risks and barriers encountered by individuals with disabilities, while efforts to prosecute traffickers must take into account the specific vulnerabilities of women and children with disabilities as both victims and survivors. Moreover, protection mechanisms should be tailored to provide holistic support and resources that cater to the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities affected by trafficking, ensuring their physical, psychological, and social recovery.

The Palermo Protocol has urged states to implement measures aimed at developing national strategies and policies that align with the objectives outlined in the Protocol and to also prioritize the inclusion and protection of individuals with disabilities. Such initiatives should aim to bridge the existing gaps in data collection, research, and service provision for women and children with disabilities affected by human trafficking, promoting a more nuanced and effective response to this pervasive crime while upholding the rights and dignity of all individuals, irrespective of their abilities.

Actually, more details will be discussed in our side event where you are all invited to join us tomorrow.

Excellences,

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you all.