



**Statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States**

**at the Security Council Open Debate on**

**"Trafficking in persons in conflict situations: forced labour, slavery and other similar practices"**

**United Nations**

**New York**

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***Check against delivery***

Mr President, Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres, Mr. Kevin Hyland, the UK's Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, and Ms. Ilwad Elman, of the Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre, for their statements.

I am speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The xxxx [ALIGNMENT] align themselves with this statement.

We would like to congratulate the United Kingdom for convening this open debate and commend their keen commitment to address the issue of trafficking in human beings and forced labour in conflict during their Presidency of the UN Security Council. We have built on the momentum created by the previous Presidencies that addressed the issue and we look forward to the continuous commitment of the international community to address this scourge.

Mr President,

Trafficking in human beings is a grave violation or abuse of human rights and a serious form of organised crime: a highly profitable business that can corrupt the legal order of a State and create a deficit of sovereignty.

The prohibition of trafficking in human beings and forced labour is expressly set forth in Article 5 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. Furthermore, the EU has recognised in its new Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy the need to counter the spill-over of insecurity that may stem from conflicts, ranging from trafficking and smuggling to terrorism.

The UN provides an excellent forum for achieving this, and the European Union has placed multilateralism at the core of our common external agenda. We wish to reiterate that we stand behind the commitments in the New York Declaration

for Refugees and Migrants to combat human trafficking, including through targeted measures to identify, protect, and assist victims, as well as to prevent human trafficking among those affected by displacement, taking into account that women and children are in particularly vulnerable situations.

We believe that it is important to strengthen multilateral cooperation and partnerships, and in line with Resolution 1325 and Resolution 2250, we also need to engage more women and young people in both peace-building activities and actions against human trafficking.

Mr President,

We welcome the report submitted by the Secretary-General in November 2016 on the implementation of measures to counter trafficking in persons. We note with attention the nexus between conflict and trafficking in human beings, which can take in this context many despicable forms — from sexual slavery, to labour exploitation, slavery-like conditions, or organ removal — the list is long and gruesome. We particularly note the links between conflict, trafficking in human beings and other forms of crime, including corruption, organised crime and the financing of terrorism.

Importantly, trafficking is gender-specific. The most recent EU data show that trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is still the most widespread form encountered by the authorities and the majority of its victims are women and girls. What is more, according to the same EU data, trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation affects primarily men and boys. In this respect, we call for a more gender-specific, targeted approach in all actions against trafficking in human beings.

Mr President,

We wish to recall the need to focus on the prevention of trafficking in human beings in all its forms. Any other approach comes too late for the victims of this deplorable crime. In this respect, ensuring accountability for the perpetrators is essential as a deterrent. We cannot accept a culture of impunity and, by cracking down on the profits generated by the traffickers and associated groups or individuals, we can strike a decisive blow. In order to do this we must follow the financial trails and use all available investigative tools and techniques to prosecute and bring to justice the perpetrators.

By upholding and promoting international standards, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols; the ILO Conventions on Forced Labour and the additional Protocol, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and other international legal instruments, we contribute to ensuring strong foundations for the rule of law. We need to renew and invigorate our efforts to implement the existing legal architecture.

Mr President,

The EU has built an ambitious, gender-specific, child-sensitive and comprehensive legal and policy framework to combat trafficking in human beings. Anti-trafficking actions also form a key part of our external policies and funding, and the EU continues to cooperate with and support UN agencies in the fight against trafficking. One such joint action is the EU-UNODC Global Action to Prevent and Address Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants, a

10.5 million EUR project implemented in partnership with IOM and UNICEF, with assistance delivered in 13 countries around the world.

Mr President,

We recognise that instability creates an ideal environment for the criminal activities of traffickers. We are therefore actively supporting all UN-led efforts to bring an end to the political and security crises in Syria and Libya. We are also prioritising activity on counter-terrorism, working with partners across the world to address threats from all terrorist organisations, including those like Daesh and Boko Haram, who have clearly and quite publicly exploited and trafficked women and girls for their own objectives. We need to understand further the links between terrorist organisations and the organised criminal groups who carry out the trafficking of people and other illicit commodities. We need to actively pursue an agenda to increase women's participation in peace processes and in encountering violent extremism so as to ensure effective measures and solutions. We must work together to do all we can to stop this multiple scourge on our societies.

Trafficking in human beings existed prior to the current migration crisis and the emergence of Daesh, and we have for some time systematically addressed it in all of the EU's relevant agreements and partnerships with third countries, as well as in bilateral and regional dialogues on migration, mobility and security, including visa liberalisation dialogues.

We also know, though, that trafficking in human beings has been exacerbated by the current migration challenges, which traffickers exploit to target those in the most vulnerable situations, women and girls. Young children are becoming victims of trafficking, girls are becoming victims of sexual exploitation, and

unaccompanied children are at risk of being trafficked. Addressing trafficking in human beings is, thus, included in key policy instruments such as the European Agenda on migration and in the priority domains of the EU-Africa Valletta Action Plan.

There is a market for the trafficked human 'merchandise'. We need to investigate, prosecute and convict the perpetrators of these crimes and we need to put an end their impunity. Effectively preventing this heinous crime necessitates reducing the demand and incentives for trafficking in human beings, including active work to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. At the same time, it is of paramount importance to ensure that victims are duly assisted, supported and protected. We must ensure that victims are treated as rights-holders. We must also ensure victims do not go undetected in the context of mass migration flows, that asylum systems are not abused, and we need to prevent groups in vulnerable situations, such as unaccompanied children, from falling into the hands of traffickers.

The EU will continue to develop partnerships in order to address trafficking in human beings worldwide. Accountability and collective efforts are needed to put an end to this terrible crime and the deplorable consequences for its victims.

Thank you.