



Remarks

by

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President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

Special High-Level Event on

“Improving the coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons”

New York

14 July 2014

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Excellencies,
President of ECOSOC,
President of the Security Council, (TBC)
Distinguished Speakers and Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

More than sixty years ago, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It proclaims that all humans are born free, that no one shall be held in slavery or servitude, and that slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms. Yet today millions of people, the majority of them women and children, are victims of a modern form of slavery: we call it human trafficking.

As we open this meeting, let me acknowledge the Group of Friends United Against Human Trafficking and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for bringing us together ahead of the first-ever World Day against Trafficking in Persons that will be observed on July 30.

While I commend participants' commitment to fighting modern-day slavery, it is deeply regrettable that we have need for such an occasion.

Excellencies,

At any given time, an estimated 2.5 million people are trapped in modern-day slavery. Men, women and children fall into the hands of traffickers both in their own countries and abroad. Every country in the world is affected by human trafficking, whether as a country of origin, transit or destination for victims. Slavery, in both its ancient and modern forms, is not only shameful, it is as the abolitionist John Wesley said "the execrable sum of all villainies," and has no place in our world.

Not only is human trafficking one of the most grotesque violations of human rights, it is a lucrative crime for perpetrators. With annual profits as high as 36 billion dollars per year, it ranks as the world's third most profitable crime after illicit drug and arms trafficking.

As a global community, we have recognized the threat human trafficking poses to security, development and human rights. The 2005 United Nations World Summit Outcome document urges all States to [quote] “devise, enforce and strengthen effective measures to combat and eliminate all forms of trafficking in persons, to counter the demand for trafficked victims, and to protect the victims.” [End quote]

In 2010, our General Assembly adopted the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, urging Governments worldwide to take coordinated and consistent measures to defeat this scourge. The Plan calls for integrating the fight against human trafficking into the UN’s broader programmes in order to boost development and strengthen security worldwide. One of the crucial provisions in the Plan is the establishment of a UN Voluntary Trust Fund for victims of trafficking, especially women and children.

Within the past year, our General Assembly held a high-level meeting to appraise the Global Plan of Action. Member States also adopted resolution 68/192 and designated July 30 as the World Day against Trafficking in Persons. This resolution declared that such a day was necessary to [quote] “raise awareness of the situation of victims of human trafficking and for the promotion and protection of their rights.” [end quote.]

While such steps are necessary, they are sorely insufficient. Much more work needs to be done to help the millions of women, men and children who are trafficked for sexual exploitation and into forced labour; the victims who are trafficked for forced marriages, for begging or for removal of their organs; and those who are coerced into participating in crimes and armed combat.

We must do more to prevent vulnerable people from falling prey to traffickers and support trafficking survivors, as well as assist the brave individuals who work with trafficked persons and ensure that they can rebuild their lives.

By funding organizations that directly assist victims of human trafficking, the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children is a

key instrument for providing much-needed support to survivors. The Trust Fund is financed solely through voluntary contributions from Governments, the business community and people of goodwill, and I encourage all Member States to do their part.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Human trafficking takes place in the dark margins of our societies, which can make it tempting to ignore in favor of more obvious challenges; however, millions of people are depending on our attention and engagement. All nations and segments of society must work together to end this assault on human dignity. We must prosecute and punish the criminals involved and protect and reintegrate survivors into our communities. We must take concerted action now to defend the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and ensure that no one is held in modern day slavery. As we embark on what I expect to be a new era in global development with the post 2015 development agenda, we cannot forget the millions of innocent people who suffer at the hands of human trafficking.

Indeed let us mark this first World Day against Trafficking in Persons by renewing our commitment to end this grave crime and human rights violation, and follow up with needed action. The next review of the Global Plan of Action by the General Assembly is in 2017, and I hope we will be able to report concrete progress towards meeting this worthy goal.

Thank you.
