

3 June 2008

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Thematic Debate on Human Trafficking**

Deputy Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Human trafficking is a crime against humanity - the modern form of slavery!

Two hundred years after the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and as we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, it remains a flagrant breach of human dignity.

We can only fight it successfully if we work in partnership, across borders and across all parts of society.

I would therefore like to commend the initiative and valuable support of Member States for raising the profile of this issue in the General Assembly.

Today's debate provides the first opportunity for the General Assembly and its non-governmental partners to comprehensively discuss how best we can strengthen cooperation and raise greater awareness on how to combat and prevent human trafficking; to protect the victims and prosecute the perpetrators.

Expanding the outreach of the General Assembly has been a key component of strengthening the significance and relevance of the United Nation during the 62nd session.

I would therefore like to welcome the participation of the many non-governmental representatives here today from regional organizations, the private sector, media, and civil society.

In particular, allow me to give a special welcome to our keynote speakers.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, His Excellency Anwar Gargash for his government's firm opposition against the exploitation of human beings for any purpose and against the coercive, illegal and inhumane treatment of any individual. The UAE's contribution to the organization of this debate is a mark of their continued commitment to stamp out all forms of human trafficking.

I would also like to recognize the important contribution of our second keynote speaker, the actress and philanthropist Ashley Judd, who has campaigned tirelessly in many countries against this inhumane practice. Ms. Judd provided an important piece of guidance for all of us here

today, that work on this issue and other forms of human injustice demands both, a rational as well as an emotional commitment. She summed it up by saying; “the longest journey I have ever taken is from my head to my heart.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The General Assembly has had a special role in setting an effective global normative framework and establishing institutional mechanisms for combating trafficking in persons. And also, through raising awareness of human trafficking and promoting multi-faceted cooperation between Member States, the UN system and civil society actors at large.

Trafficking in persons was first denounced as incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human being by the 1949 UN Convention for the Suppression of the Trafficking in Persons and Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others.

In 2000, the milestone UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and Children , was adopted and laid down the first comprehensive international definition of trafficking.

The Assembly followed-up in 2006 by adopting resolutions against trafficking in women and girls.

And in 2007, the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT) was launched to coordinate actions among all stakeholders to strengthen implementation of existing laws.

Regional organizations have also played an important role.

In 2004, ASEAN adopted the Declaration against Trafficking in Persons Particularly Women and Children; in 2005, the Council of Europe adopted the Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings; in 2006, the African Union’s set out an action plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children.

These are but a few of the many valuable contributions that have been made internationally.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Excellencies,

We therefore must ask ourselves, “why with all these laws and international agreements in place, why is the problem getting worse?”

I would argue that our increasing interdependence has provided new avenues for criminal networks to operate on a global scale. Human trafficking now affects all societies and all regions of the world, no matter whether developed or developing.

Trafficking thrives because it takes place against the backdrop of the increased demand for cheap labour and service - particularly from the sex industry – and the easy means of global communication and transport. There are numerous countries of origin, transit and destinations that are exploited by vast international criminal networks.

A recent global report on forced labour by the International Labour Organization suggested that the annual illicit profits realized from trafficked labourers amounts now to 32 billion US dollars.

While it is clear that we have worked hard to put in place a normative framework to fight human trafficking, there remains a vast gulf between the letter of the law and the situation on the ground.

Given the nature of the problem it is imperative that each and every country stands firm against trafficking. Our ability to tackle the issues is only as strong as the weakest link in the chain that can be exploited by criminals.

I therefore call upon Member States to put their commitments into practice; to ensure there are proper mechanisms in place to provide protection and assistance to the trafficked; for the prosecution of traffickers, as well as, actions to strengthen prevention.

I also call upon those Member States who are not yet party to the relevant treaties, to adopt the normative frameworks as soon as possible.

Furthermore, I would like to emphasize that in order to speed up the implementation of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, it is of crucial importance to put in place a regular review mechanism to hold Member States and the UN system to account.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We can make a start today by squarely addressing the three Ps as defined in the Protocol;

Protection of the vulnerable,
 Prosecution of criminals,
 and, Prevention of trafficking.

For prevention to be effective, it is crucial that we address the demand for trafficked persons, and the social and economic conditions that make people vulnerable to trafficking.

The private sector in partnership with others has a crucial role to play here. We need a clear and transparent self-regulating code for the private sector, which sets out concrete measures and tools to prevent forced labour and trafficking. Such policies should apply to all enterprises involved in a company's supply chains.

To break through the barrier of ignorance that persists about the dangers of trafficking, we must work on raising global awareness of this phenomenon, in particular, by educating potential victims, especially young people.

The media can do a lot to avert gullible victims from falling prey to traffickers. A number of films have been made recently that have raised awareness. Let me just mention one of them, "Trade", which was shown at the UN and depicts the flight of a 13 year old girl trapped in a criminal underworld. It left an enduring impression on me.

The media can raise consumer awareness about the conditions under which products are manufactured so that we can make more informed decisions.

To catch and prosecute the traffickers we need closer cross-border cooperation. Effective prosecution also requires providing the appropriate protection and assistance to victims, especially by promoting understanding between victim's service providers and law enforcement.

But let me reiterate that effective prosecution of human traffickers, and solutions that address its causes and protect its victims can only be achieved with closer cooperation between all stakeholders: the government, the international institutions, the private sector, the NGOs and the media.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Human trafficking is an inherent and grave threat to our human security, as discussed in this Assembly during the recent thematic debate on human security. The need for comprehensive, integrated and people-centered solutions at the crossroads between security, development and human rights must be at the forefront of policy in order to tackle this global challenge.

Our approach to dealing with this issue must be comprehensive.

That means we must deal with the underlying conditions that feed human trafficking- both on the demand, as well as, the supply side.

It is my hope that this debate will raise greater public awareness about the severity of the problem, and generate fresh momentum among Member States and other stakeholders to strengthen cooperation and fully implement existing international agreements.

We have the tools. We must use them more effectively to stamp out human trafficking forever.

In this regard, I would like this debate to make a decisive and lasting contribution.

May I thank you for your attention.