

13 May 2009

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Closing of the General Assembly Interactive Thematic Dialogue
on Taking Collective Action to End Human Trafficking**

Delivered by H.E. Mr. Maged A. Abdelaziz, Vice President of the Sixty-third Session of the General Assembly

Once again, I have the honour to present the closing statement of the President of the General Assembly. His words follow:

Your Excellency Nestor Arbito Chica, Minister of Justice and Human Rights of Ecuador,
Excellencies,
Mr. Under Secretary-General Antonio Maria Costa,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we come to the close of this Thematic Dialogue on Taking Collective Action to End Human Trafficking, I want to thank all of the panelists and moderators and especially the Delegates who participated so constructively in this timely exchange.

I am grateful to His Excellency Nestor Arbito Chica for his candid description of efforts in Ecuador, and to Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, Director General of UNODC, for bringing his expert insights from Vienna. The UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, aptly subtitled "Human Trafficking: A Crime that Shames Us All", provides us, together with the testimony of speakers on our three panels, disturbing and compelling insights into the complex subject we are addressing.

Today we must demonstrate to the world that the UN system and this Assembly have heard the appeal for a coordinated, action-oriented and rights-based approach to end this heinous crime. Human trafficking is a multifaceted and crosscutting phenomena that should be addressed by a range of government ministries, intergovernmental organizations, led by the UN system and the Member States, together with the crucial support of organized civil society. Without improved coordination and outreach in our efforts, victims will not receive the protection and assistance to which they are entitled.

In addition to the legislative and juridical efforts underway, we know that of the millions of women, men, girls and boys are caught up in this sinister web of trafficking, only 22,000 are rescued by their families, government authorities and NGOs dedicated to this work each year. We are not providing the protection that these vulnerable people need.

We must shed more light on the problems. It is unlikely that the hundreds of thousands of people who fall victim to this modern-day slave trade each year will ever know of our solidarity with them. But they are nameless victims who inhabit the darkest corners of our societies and we must end their anonymity as well as the anonymity and impunity of their tormentors.

At a groundbreaking meeting entitled “Human Trafficking at the Crossroads” organized by the royal family of the Kingdom of Bahrain last March, government and UN representatives and NGOs and a dedicated group of celebrities from around the world agreed on a plan for a global media campaign to shed light on the corruption that allows these traffickers and their customers to flourish. Just last night UNODC, in partnership with the International Criminal Court Trust Fund for Victims launched a benefit exhibition to expose two contemporary manifestations of human trafficking: Child soldiering and the abduction young girls. We must support these efforts to use the arts as a strategic tool to return to the victims their names, their identities and their rightful place in society.

In recent months we have witnessed the breakdown of our global economy as thousands of enterprises fall into bankruptcy. I am convinced that this crisis reflects a widespread moral bankruptcy as well for our very systems allow for human trafficking to persist. Indeed, many national justice systems belittle the seriousness of this crime. As indicated in the UNODC report on Global Trafficking, two out of every five countries covered the survey had not recorded a single conviction of traffickers.

I know many of you share my fear that the problem is likely to be exacerbated by the deepening economic crisis, one which could increase both the supply of vulnerable potential victims and the demand for cheap labour. Indeed, the report released only yesterday by the ILO on forced labor should be a wake up call for all of us here today on the need to take prompt and effective action.

Last December, the General Assembly adopted a resolution that demands better coordination of efforts against human trafficking and the protection of victims. Now we must work to give this legislation life. The GA resolution specifically calls on Governments, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to improve their efforts and join together in backing the international initiative to combat trafficking.

I am aware of the concern expressed by a few Member States today that a Global Plan of Action may weaken the UN Protocol and its mechanisms or overburden the UNODC. However, numerous panelists have demonstrated that a Global Plan of Action would build upon the three pillars contained in the Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish human trafficking. In this manner, such a Plan of Action would provide coherence to national, regional and global efforts, and serve to ensure complementarity, thereby reinforcing the existing international normative framework.

For these reasons, I am pleased to hear the appeals at this meeting to support the General Assembly action on a Global Plan of Action to prevent human trafficking, prosecute traffickers, and protect and assist the victims. I will work hard with the 192 Member States of this Assembly to develop a Global Plan of Action.

We have international treaties, a Protocol, and numerous Resolution and Declarations that commit our countries: yet we are still lacking a blueprint for global action on the ground, one that brings together the punitive and restorative measures, and joins the development, justice and security dimensions into a common endeavor; hence the importance of the General Assembly Plan of Action, covering all these important dimensions.

Although the General Assembly has pledged its commitment to fighting this crime in several important resolutions, change — real, credible and sustained change — takes more than mere lamentations, declarations and resolutions.

To muster the required political will we must tap into the reserves of moral courage that lay within each of us as individuals and of all of us as nations. Then, and only then, will we be able to carry out the changes needed to ensure freedom for all men and women. If we do so, our hearts and our capacity to love and serve will grow. The partnerships that have been cultivated and energized here today will be in the forefront of this campaign. I thank you all for helping in this noble endeavour.