

13 May 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Closing of the High-level Meeting on the Appraisal of the
Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have come to the end of a thought and action provoking High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Appraisal of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, but we still have miles to go before we can proclaim that all human beings are born free and that none are held in slavery or servitude, as this General Assembly envisaged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights over six decades ago. It is not often that a meeting of this kind lasts two days: this in itself is testimony of the increased focus and dedication that Member States are committing to the issue of modern day slavery, but we must go further.

First allow me to take this opportunity to once again thank the co-facilitators for this event, the Permanent Representative of Cape Verde, H.E. Mr. Antonio Pedro Monteiro Lima and the Permanent Representative of Austria, H.E. Mr. Martin Sajdik, for their excellent efforts in making this High Level Meeting a productive and illuminating one. Their important chair summaries highlight the illuminating and frank discussion in which Member States and Civil Society engaged yesterday. I also wish to thank the Secretary General for his commitment to this meeting and this cause and the Executive Director of UN Office on Drugs and Crime and his team for their expertise and invaluable contribution. Finally, I thank all of you, Excellencies, Civil Society, and participants in the panels, plenary and side events, for having ensured that this event was well attended by Ministers and other distinguished representatives near and far.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your testimonies and proposals in the course of this meeting have been enlightening. It reminded us how much we can do to tackle this heinous crime despite the divergent contexts in which we all operate. Some of us are transit countries, others countries of origin or destination, and some of us may face two or three of these challenges in our countries at the same time. Many best practices were exchanged in the course of the Meeting as were the challenges in the implementation of the Global Plan of Action. In accordance with Resolution 67/190 I will soon disseminate a summary of the high-level meeting, identifying achievements, gaps and challenges in the implementation of the United Nations Global Plan of Action and relevant legal instruments, but now I will quickly highlight five.

First, still too many Member States have not ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, and implementation is lacking among many who have ratified it years ago. Passing legislation that criminalizes trafficking in persons, and at the same time protects the rights of

victims, is one step in the right direction. However, such legislation means nothing if it is not being implemented by our law enforcement agencies, lawyers and judges. As a result, impunity for trafficking in persons crimes remains a considerable problem – we must phase this out in our life time.

Second, the role of NGOs is indispensable in our fight against human trafficking. It is mostly NGOs who work with - and through - survivors on the ground: Member States must continue to learn from civil society and redouble their efforts to seek their input and guidance as we implement the Global Plan of Action.

Third, there is a real need for increased cooperation, partnerships and technical assistance to better implement the Global Plan of Action and relevant legal instruments. In addition to bilateral and multilateral exchanges and better coordination among UN entities, particularly the 16 entities that form the Interagency Coordination group Against Trafficking in Persons (or ICAT), there is a dire need to develop partnerships with the media and private sector, and to focus on a “bottom up” approach where appropriate. This will ensure that our prevention work focuses on the villages and towns where sophisticated trafficking routes often start.

Fourth, many of you reflected on the need for increased coordination, research and data. More must be done in these areas. Many of you also noted the extent to which you rely on the UN Office on Drugs and Crime for the same - on the ground as well as at the intergovernmental level. As the main UN entity mandated to fight human trafficking, it currently has only two regular budget posts dedicated to this cause. I echo the call of many to strengthen the capacity of UNODC so that it can continue to assist us with the grandiose task ahead of us all.

Fifth, the disparity between the criminal income of the trafficking in persons industry -- some billions of dollars a year -- and the comparatively meager funds dedicated to preventing and responding to this crime. The United Nations Trust Fund for Victims of Human Trafficking, Especially Women and Children, one of the most important aspects of the Global Plan of Action, has done much with the very little in resources its received, and cannot continue to meet its mandate absent robust and reliable funding. I sincerely thank Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Belarus, the United Arab Emirates, Australia, Austria the Kingdom of Thailand, and Singapore for pledges made to the Trust Fund during this meeting and hope this will inspire others to contribute to the Fund.

We owe it to our young girls, boys, women and men to provide alternatives to - as Goodwill Ambassador Mira Sorvino put it - “being swept up by traffickers into a sea of anonymous suffering”. The survivors count on us today.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the challenges ahead of us I am encouraged by the overwhelming political will heard in this room to step up efforts against trafficking in persons. Let us capitalize on this momentum and re-energize ourselves to eradicate this atrocious phenomenon for once and for all.

Thank you.