

**Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*):**

First of all, I would like to thank the United Kingdom for organizing this open debate.

Human trafficking is, unfortunately, an increasingly common feature of modern conflict. In that regard, I wish to reply to two of the main questions asked in the concept note drafted for the debate (S/2017/198, annex). First, how can the United Nations and its Member States better address vulnerable women and girls, children, and displaced persons? Second, how can we ensure justice for victims of slavery, human trafficking or forced labor during conflicts?

With regard to the first question, the Belgian national action plan against human trafficking utilizes different strategies to address vulnerable populations. For instance, it takes gender into account. It also teaches a “train the trainers” course for defence personnel who combat human trafficking. Relevant training is also provided to the personnel of the federal agency that welcomes asylum seekers. Additionally, a manual has been prepared to educate asylum seekers on the conditions and rights of workers in Belgium so as to reduce the risk of abuse and exploitation.

On the second issue, the fight against impunity is a core component of our national action plan on women, peace, and security. One of the priorities of the plan is the protection of women and girls from all forms of violence, including sexual violence. This is a topic that we also address in our commission on the status of women. Since human trafficking during conflicts is often for sexual exploitation, a section of the action plan details several concrete actions for those cases, including support for and cooperation with bilateral partners in order to embed attention for and expertise on the matter in national police and justice apparatuses, and the promotion of practical international legal cooperation tools.

With regard to international cooperation on criminal matters, I note the initiative mentioned by Argentina, Belgium, the Netherlands and Slovenia during the previous open debate on human trafficking (see S/PV.7847) — to promote the negotiation of a multilateral treaty for mutual legal assistance among States and extradition for domestic prosecution of the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Such a treaty would be a useful tool for facilitating better cooperation among States investigating and prosecuting those crimes, and would enable signatories to both comply with their international obligations and strengthen their national legal system.

Of course, the primary responsibility to prosecute such crimes lies with each State but, because of their transnational nature, this proves to be a challenging task. Indeed, the suspects, witnesses, evidence or materials attesting to acts of human trafficking must often be gathered from several States. As such, effective mutual legal assistance among States is essential for States that wish to investigate and prosecute those crimes to ensure justice for the victims.