

Ms. Mejía Vélez (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*):

First, I welcome the Security Council presidency of the United Kingdom and thank it for having convened this open debate and for the presidential note (S/PRST/2015/25), which deals with what is perhaps one of the most tragic topics: the trafficking of persons in armed conflicts.

The statements we have heard this morning paint a picture of the horror that millions of people suffer due to trafficking of persons in armed conflicts and the challenges that the international community confronts in effectively addressing that phenomenon, which especially afflicts women and children. The trafficking of persons is the slavery of our times. It is not only an abomination of the past; millions of people today live in conditions of slavery. Most trafficking victims are vulnerable women and children, almost always tricked or abducted and forced to live a life of suffering, exploitation, torture or servitude. That cruel practice has become a global industry, and it must be decisively combated by all.

In September 2015, through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States committed to adopting measures relating to the trafficking of persons. As the Secretary-General himself expressed in his statement this morning, the Agenda is a valuable tool for all States, in keeping with our commitments, to contribute to the eradication of that scourge.

The figures are disheartening, and Colombia is no stranger to this issue. That is why I wish to reiterate the unswerving commitment of the Government to the fight against that phenomenon, which has a nature and effects that lead to human rights abuses. Consequently, we believe it is essential for our efforts to be able to bolster countries' capabilities to more comprehensively combat this kind of crime.

Between 2012 and 2016, the Government of Colombia assisted 199 citizens who were victims of human trafficking, and in 2016 alone, we provided immediate assistance to 37 victims of reported cases of human trafficking. Similarly, in 2016 there were 28,052 undocumented — and often exploited — migrants in Colombia, most coming from countries of our region and other parts of the world that use this transit route to countries in the North.

That is why, among other legal and governmental measures, we joined the initiative of the Global Action to Prevent and Address Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants, which the Government will support with a view to assisting and protecting victims and vulnerable people, as well as advancing prevention, investigation and prosecution efforts.

Echoing the appeals of the Secretary-General and the President this morning, only together can we tackle this scourge and in that way seek to free our countries from the transnational organized crime that profits from it.