

Mr. Gone (Côte d'Ivoire) (spoke in French):

I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We have every faith in you and will provide you with support during your term.

My delegation is very pleased to participate in this high-level open debate on trafficking in persons in conflict situations, which gives us the opportunity to discuss this important issue. Allow me also to congratulate the speakers this morning on the contributions they made to our debate.

Trafficking in persons in conflict situations is of particular concern. The images and testimony provided by the media in conflict zones show to what extent this phenomenon is not only a serious violation of human rights, but also a real threat to international peace and security. Last Thursday, 9 March, at the United Nations, at a high-level event on the fight against impunity for atrocities, we heard a moving account by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. We also heard at the event the heart-rending account by a young Yazidi woman who had been held hostage by Islamic State jihadists and we heard her plea for the Security Council to take up the fate of her people in Iraq. Testimonies, such as that of this young Iraqi, could also be that of the people in the Lake Chad basin, of many countries in conflict and of many refugee camps in Africa and around the world. Since this morning, many speakers have recalled such practices, which are well known and varied. They include sexual slavery, the use of victims for labour, forced domestic work and forced recruitment into armed groups.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), of which my country is a member and which is affected by this phenomenon, has since 2002 regularly adopted several action plans, the most recent of which covers the period 2016-2020. These plans propose, among other things, the adoption of national legislation penalizing trafficking in persons, measures to protect and assist victims, and public awareness campaigns. In this context, the strategic and operational support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to ECOWAS has made a significant contribution to the prevention and suppression of trafficking in persons in West Africa.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to thank the United Nations for its multiform support through UNODC for the implementation of the ECOWAS action plan. In line with this regional strategy, Côte d'Ivoire ratified, on 25 October 2012, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and signed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. We also adopted law 2010-272 on the prohibition of trafficking in persons and the worst forms of child labour and the law of September 2016 on combating trafficking in persons.

Given the unprecedented scale of the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings in times of conflict, the mobilization of the entire international community is more necessary than ever. In this regard, my delegation welcomes the adoption last December of resolution 2331 (2016). In particular, my country encourages all Member States to encourage the implementation of existing national and international legal instruments to combat this scourge, in particular by bringing the perpetrators of these crimes before the competent criminal courts.

The existence of international organized crime networks mean that States, civil society organizations and the United Nations system must coordinate their actions. As has been pointed out throughout this debate, trafficking in persons in times of conflict most often flourishes in an environment that has been weakened by a decline in the rule of law. Support for strong State institutions appears to be an essential in this regard. The strengthening of the capacity of civilians fighting this phenomenon should also be encouraged.

While the correlation between hotbeds of conflict and the resurgence of trafficking in persons seems undeniable, we also must bear in mind such situations as poverty and low levels of education. The Government of Côte d'Ivoire believes, therefore, that the fight against trafficking in persons in times of conflict and in times of peace must take a comprehensive approach. The appropriate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in fragile countries is an opportunity. It is also important to support States affected through the creation of databases to better identify the phenomenon of trafficking in persons in order to improve victim assistance.

At this moment, when the Commission on the Status of Women is holding its sixty-first session, and against the backdrop of the empowerment of women, my delegation hopes that today's debate will help to give hope to all victims of trafficking in human beings in situations of conflict.