

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia):

I would like to thank the United Kingdom for convening today's open debate and for its leadership and commitment with respect to this important issue.

Estonia aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

In recent years, the problem of human trafficking in conflict situations has become more exacerbated, both in scope and nature. We are witnessing an increasing number of conflicts, and, unfortunately, human trafficking has become a regular feature and by-product of armed conflicts. Trafficking in persons in conflict situations has therefore reached an unprecedented scale.

In order to address the problem of human trafficking in conflict situations, the international community needs to focus simultaneously on prevention, protection and prosecution.

First, preventing violent conflict from occurring in the first place is the best guarantee to avert human trafficking from happening. That is one of the many reasons why Estonia fully supports the Secretary-General's emphasis on shifting from reaction to prevention. We commend his efforts to improve the United Nations capacity to take early action to prevent violent conflict and link the reform of the United Nations peace and security architecture with the reform of the United Nations development system. The United Nations needs to fulfil its core functions more effectively and in a more coherent manner.

Secondly, the international community needs to scale up protection efforts to ensure that those affected by conflict situations, especially women and girls, do not become vulnerable to traffickers. To achieve this, Estonia calls for better coordination among stakeholders and institutions. The Security Council could lead this process and foster greater normative, operational and strategic coherence across the United Nations system on the topic by engaging directly with relevant United Nations mandate holders, including the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and its consequences, the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and for Children and Armed Conflict, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other relevant agencies.

Thirdly, there must be no room for impunity, and all perpetrators must be held accountable. While the problem of trafficking is international in nature and therefore requires an international response, we must not forget that the primary responsibility for bringing those responsible to justice lies with the States. National policy and action programmes, including efforts to train immigration authorities, police forces, prosecutors and judges, are crucial to eradicating human trafficking.

While most countries have adopted legislation criminalizing human trafficking, attention still needs to be directed to enforcement. Accordingly, the States themselves and the international community must take action to prevent the culture of impunity from spreading. Furthermore, victims must have access to adequate assistance, support and effective remedies.

It is important for the international community to continue its efforts aimed at tackling and preventing the activities of armed groups, terrorist groups and transnational organized crime groups that are involved in human trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery. Estonia believes that trafficking in persons in conflict situations must and can be eradicated. But to reach this goal, the fight needs to be stepped up. We remain ready to actively participate in future discussions to shape the international community's response to this global threat.

