

Mrs. Boura (Greece):

I would like to join others in expressing condolences to Russia in connection with the assassination of its Ambassador in Ankara, and to Germany in connection with the victims of the terrorist attack in Berlin.

I wish to congratulate Spain for having organized this open debate. Greece aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and wishes to add the following from a national point of view.

Over the past two decades, the ground-breaking work of the United Nations bodies, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe, the International Organization for Migration and regional initiatives such as the European Union Network of National Rapporteurs has consolidated an important legislative framework for eradicating human trafficking. Yet despite the efforts made, the official statistics on human trafficking remain comparable to those of a “rare crime”, with just a small percentage of perpetrators convicted and only a few victims saved.

We are firmly convinced that the international community should focus on strengthening law enforcement, establishing a proactive and inclusive identification regime for victims and a comprehensive awareness-raising campaign. At the same time, we need to step up efforts to crack down on the enormous profits generated by traffickers by following financial trails, and use all available investigative tools to prosecute the perpetrators.

The unprecedented levels of human displacement have also revealed the increased vulnerability of potential trafficking victims in refugee and migratory flows. Irregular undocumented migrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, making the nexus between trafficking and irregular migration more relevant than ever. While some countries increase border controls to curb migration flows, many migrants turn to organized criminal networks to arrange their bordercrossing.

Trafficking in women and girls has become a tactic of terrorism, with terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Boko Haram openly and systematically promoting the trafficking and sexual enslavement of women and girls. To address the nexus between human trafficking, conflict, sexual violence and violent extremism requires a holistic approach. Trafficking as a financial resource for terrorism must not be underestimated.

Greece is a transit country for thousands of migrants and refugees who attempt to cross the Mediterranean and flee war, violence and persecution. As the first entry point for migrants and refugees arriving in Europe, Greece is very well aware of the challenges and of its pivotal role in combating such phenomena.

In this context, we have established a national coordination mechanism as well as a national identification and referral mechanism. Both mechanisms are coordinated by the Office of the National Rapporteur at the Minister for Foreign Affairs and operate as a hub for partnership-building among all relevant stakeholders. The comprehensive protection of vulnerable persons, including women, girls and unaccompanied children, figures high in our priorities. Increased emphasis placed on extending identification procedures in the context of mixed migration and refugee flows.

Human trafficking, this modern form of slavery, has no place in the twenty-first century. We hope that today's debate will mark a flagship event that will urge all competent stakeholders to deploy the imperative human, legal and financial resources to effectively eradicate this heinous form of human rights violation and organized crime. We need to work closely together to promote multilateral cooperation, enhance early- identification procedures and establish robust referral mechanisms, so that victims can address the protection services they so need and deserve.

A consistent human rights and cross-sectoral approach can lead to positive results in counter- trafficking. To that end, we must identify the partnerships to be employed, aiming at protecting vulnerable groups at risk of being exploited or traded. At the same time, we must combat the culture of impunity regarding the high levels of "demand" for "services" related to trafficking.

Let us not forget that the task before us is not merely about implementing laws and penal codes. We aim first and foremost to uphold human dignity amid a world of conflict, poverty and desperation, with vulnerable groups of women and children at high risk of being manipulated, exploited and savagely abused for profit. Traffickers and warlords are relying on our failure to protect vulnerable people.