

Archbishop Auza (Holy See):

The Holy See thanks the presidency of the United Kingdom for raising today's topic to the level of open debate in this Chamber.

In his words and actions, Pope Francis has made it very clear from his very first days as Pope that the fight against trafficking in persons would be one of the defining priorities of his papacy. He has not hesitated in defining it as a form of slavery, a crime against humanity, a shameful and grave violation of human rights, an atrocious scourge that is present throughout the world on a broad scale, including as it relates to tourism.

The flood of trafficking victims is the result of many tributaries. Among them are extreme poverty, underdevelopment and exclusion, especially when combined with a lack of access to education or scarce, even non-existent, employment opportunities. Human traffickers have no qualms about exploiting very vulnerable people escaping economic privation and natural disasters. In our day, however, wars and conflicts have become the prime driver of trafficking in persons. They provide an enabling environment in which traffickers can operate, as persons fleeing persecutions and conflicts are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked. Conflicts have created conditions in which terrorists, armed groups and transnational organized-crime networks can thrive by exploiting individuals and populations reduced to extreme vulnerability through persecution and multiple forms of violence.

In that context, my delegation once again expresses profound concern for the ancient Christian communities, the Yazidis and other religious and ethnic minority groups in Mesopotamia, who have been enslaved, sold, killed, trafficked and subjected to extreme forms of humiliation. The apparent lack of serious efforts to bring to justice the perpetrators of such acts of genocide and massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law leaves many people perplexed and wondering how many more atrocities can be tolerated before the victims obtain rescue, protection and justice.

Once more, the Holy See would like to underline its constant and firm condemnation of the relative ease with which arms, even weapons of mass destruction, get into the hands of terrorists and armed groups, giving them the means to continue, with equal ease, to traffic and enslave individuals and even entire communities. The proliferation of arms, whether they are weapons of mass destruction or merely conventional, facilitates and prolongs violent conflicts that make people extremely vulnerable to traffickers and smugglers. As long as wars and conflicts rage, the trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation, forced labour and similar crimes will continue to flourish.

The Holy See therefore strongly appeals to States not to supply arms to groups or regimes that would most likely use them against their very own people, but to implement arms-related treaties strictly and to use the full force of the law in the fight against arms trafficking. Moreover, the criminalization of undocumented and irregular migrants exacerbates their vulnerabilities, drives them closer to the embrace of traffickers and to more extreme forms of exploitation, and renders them less likely to collaborate with the law-enforcement authorities to catch and punish the traffickers.

The challenge that trafficking in persons poses is immense and requires a commensurate response. Today, unfortunately, that response is still far from being equal to the challenge. As Pope Francis has noted several times, even though the international community has adopted numerous agreements and individual countries have adopted laws aimed at ending slavery in all its forms, even though various strategies to combat that phenomenon have been launched at both the national and the international levels, much more still needs to be done on the level of raising public awareness and effecting a better coordination of efforts by Governments, the judiciary, law-enforcement officials and

social workers to save the millions of children, women and men who are still deprived of freedom and are forced to live in slave-like conditions.

In a special way, the Holy See urges the Security Council to play a greater and more active role in the fight against the scourge of trafficking in persons, primarily through its responsibility to prevent and end armed conflicts and to help in the consolidation of peace and development.