

Mr. Roet (Israel):

Allow me to begin by reading the words of Zinab, a 31-year-old Yazidi woman:

“We were in Kocho village when they came ... The girls ages 10 to 30 were taken to Mosul ... I was taken to Tal Afar and kept in a cage ... I escaped ... but was caught again ... I was kept in a house as a slave for a month ... then another girl and I got out through a small window ... They handed me right back to Da’esh ... The man who bought me that time beat me badly and raped me whenever he wanted. He made me wash his clothes and clean his house ... [Then I escaped again, but another] guy beat me, raped me and kept me in a locked room ... Half the things that were done to me, I cannot say out loud ... I didn’t think I could survive much more.”

It may be hard to believe, or perhaps we would prefer not to believe, that 45 million people find themselves in some form of modern slavery. According to the Walk Free Foundation *Global Slavery Index*, these are 45 million people deprived of their identity, taken away from their families, traded and transferred from one hand to another as if they were pieces of property instead of human beings — imagine, 45 million people deprived of freedom. This would amount to the entire population of Ukraine, to 70 per cent of the population of France, 4.5 times the population of Bolivia, 5.5 times the population of my country and more than 13 times the population of Uruguay. It is hard to grasp this number, let alone to comprehend the tragedy and suffering. But it is impossible, even inhuman, to remain indifferent while listening to the words of people like Zinab.

In recent years, human trafficking, forced labour and slavery have become ever more dire and painful with each passing day. For our region, the Middle East, this debate could not be more relevant and timely. Vulnerable refugees fleeing the horrors of war in Syria frequently end up in another horrifying reality — that of slavery and exploitation. Armed groups, terrorists and powerful transnational criminal networks are taking advantage of the helplessness of refugees, including young children, and forcing them into labour, crime and prostitution while falsely promising them a better future in Europe. Terrorist groups like Da’esh regularly coerce girls into sex slaves and force boys as young as eight years old to carry out terrorist acts such as suicide bombing.

For many around the world, such horrors might sound like a distant reality. For us in Israel, we sadly witness such atrocities in our own backyard. Together with a surge in international terror, cases of unimaginable forced labour, slavery and untold cruelty are flooding the Middle East and flowing to other regions of the world.

The signing of Palermo Protocol and the adoption of resolution 2331 (2016) were steps in the right direction, but signing declarations and adopting resolutions is not enough. From our own experience, we know that the key to saving lives lies in the protection of those that are most vulnerable, enacting and enforcing laws and encouraging rehabilitation. In Israel in 2010, we were finally able to put an end to the trafficking of women for prostitution. Israel was able to achieve this outcome by applying a system for prevention, prosecution and rehabilitation. Israel strongly believes that by combining these three decisive actions, we will be able to work towards the eradication of slavery and human trafficking.

To conclude, in less than a month Jews around the world will sit around their Passover table and recall the story of how the ancient Israelites escaped bondage in ancient Egypt and achieved freedom in the land of Israel. Freedom and the abolishment of slavery for all humankind are indeed fundamentally enshrined in our culture. In fact, we are commanded to retell this story every year and to recall how we were treated when we were slaves — and we have been doing so for thousands of years. With the bitter memories of slavery forming our collective memories, Israel is more committed than ever to cooperating with the Council to fight against terror, slavery, forced labour, sexual slavery

and other similar practices. It is high time that we all work together to finally remove this age-old scourge from the annals of humankind.