

Mrs. Lodhi (Pakistan):

My delegation wishes to thank the United Kingdom presidency for convening today's debate, which derives added importance now, given the current annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 79 per cent, almost 80 per cent, of the victims of trafficking are women and children, which is why combating that menace is both urgent and critical.

The scourge of slavery is an abomination, for it perpetuates the domination and degradation of human life. Modern slavery, unlike its traditional form, does not seek to own people. Rather, it aims to control them by exploiting their lives or the fruits of their labour. Sexual slavery in conflict situations, the trafficking of women and girls, and bonded and forced labour are all manifestations of that evil.

Transnational organized criminal gangs have become the primary purveyors of that human misery, which they perpetuate for financial gain. Their growing nexus with terrorists is a cause for global concern, not least because it has a direct bearing on international peace and security. Conflict situations, through their confluence of circumstance and opportunities, provide an ideal environment for such unholy alliances. Heinous crimes such as the enslavement of women and children, their sexual exploitation and their recruitment in armed groups are an outrage, not only to all norms of international law, but also to humankind itself. We must work together to find an end to that perversion.

Resolution 2331 (2016) of December 2016 was significant, not only as an unequivocal affirmation by the international community of its commitment to confront that menace, but also as a call for immediate action aimed at preventing, criminalizing and prosecuting those engaged in the trafficking in persons. While the eradication of contemporary forms of slavery is an end in itself, the interdiction of trafficking-based financial flows to terrorist groups must also be addressed.

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children have served as a centrepiece of the existing global framework aimed at combating transnational organized crime. They, in turn, have also inspired and informed domestic policies. As a party to the Convention, my country, Pakistan, has taken a number of legislative and administrative steps to address human trafficking.

The international community is currently witnessing human displacement on a historic and unprecedented scale. A pervasive sense of despondency and lack of prospects, induced by protracted conflict and insecurity, lies at the core of that phenomenon — one of the greatest tragedies of our times and a defining challenge of our era. Large sections of the respective populations, especially women and children, remain especially vulnerable. As the international community seeks to evolve cohesive and coordinated strategies to manage those movements, the interest and well-being of the most vulnerable must remain paramount in our policy responses. We must, in particular, ensure that the victims of such circumstance do not, in their quest to find safety and protection beyond their borders, become fresh prey to trafficking and abuse.

In Pakistan, we have lived this ideal by generously hosting our Afghan brothers and sisters for almost four decades and ensuring their safety in their temporary home. There is an urgent imperative to evolve a better and more coordinated global response. Close collaboration between States must underpin the success of that approach. Going forward, a fundamental challenge for the international community would be to strike the right balance between human rights and the law-enforcement aspects of anti-trafficking policies. Victims of trafficking must be protected, not penalized. Concerted efforts should also be made to address the underlying root causes. Unless we resolutely put out the

fires of wars and conflicts that breed and fuel such phenomena, our efforts will at best be spasmodic and insufficient.