

Ms. Leoteau (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*):

First of all, I would like to commend and thank the Secretary-General for his briefing, and thank Mr. Fedotov, Mr. Hyland and Ms. Elman for their important contributions.

The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of measures to counter trafficking in persons (S/2016/949) has revealed that traffickers mainly take advantage of women, young people and boys and girls, in particular those traveling alone, making that group account for 79 per cent of the victims of a terrible crime that affects all countries. Armed conflicts have encouraged the trafficking in persons within the context of large migrant flows, leading to serious consequences such as early child marriage. Panama supports the eradication of child marriage in all contexts, not only in conflict situations. Some 60 per cent of the victims of trafficking are foreigners from the country with which they identify and the majority are migrants for sexual exploitation, forced labour and modern-day slavery.

One of the major challenges in prosecuting and condemning the crime of trafficking is the collection of data and proof based on which we can share good practices in an effort to overcome the growing and worrisome situation to which we can all relate when crossing borders. On 15 December 2000, Panama signed the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime — the Palermo Convention — and its protocols. Because it understands its vulnerabilities as a transit route and a country of destination for migrants, Panama now has a National Commission against Trafficking in Persons, an inter-institutional structure that provides various types of care required by victims.

Panama believes that the Security Council could request that States Members of the United Nations comply with the Convention and proceed to the next stage. We have come to a standstill on the regulatory framework. We must engage in more vigorous prosecution of traffickers and ensure that judicial systems in each country enforce the corresponding sentences. To that end, we must increase resource allocations and secure evidence, which is even more difficult in conflict situations and when dealing with terrorist groups and their actions.

We should also strengthen the Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, in particular for women and children, established by the General Assembly; not to revictimize or punish the people who have endured that crime, but rather to support and help them, guarantee their security and accept them in the countries to which they have been taken. We must insist on, promote and monitor the United Nations zero-tolerance policy towards sexual offenses, as a clear sign of the serious commitment and political will of all its constituent bodies and staff as well as its Member States.

At several open debates, we suggested that joint efforts that can be carried out by, for example, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council, should be strengthened, through the use of tools, such as the Universal Periodic Review, from which the implementation of the legal framework for the prevention, treatment and elimination of trafficking in persons in armed conflict should be monitored. We would like to make special mention of the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, whose regional headquarters for Latin America and the Caribbean is in Panama. It works to support States in the difficult tasks of preventing and punishing trafficking in persons at the global level. Likewise, we would like to make special mention of non-governmental organizations whose team members risk their lives, rescuing, helping and giving a new opportunity to victims of trafficking, in particular those working in conflict and post-conflict zones.

It is important for us to continue to review the prevention and prosecution of the crime of trafficking, as recommended by States within the context of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and including the theme in our national voluntary reviews.

