

### **The Secretary-General:**

I thank the United Kingdom for convening this meeting, which builds on last December's adoption of the far-reaching resolution 2331 (2016), targeting human trafficking in conflict situations. Allow me to start with a short personal reflection.

I come from a country that, for centuries, engaged in the cruel trade in human beings. It is part of our history that we will never allowed to be forgotten. Of course, Portugal ultimately outlawed slavery in the nineteenth century, and a global norm against it has now long been in place. Indeed, the very conscience of the United Nations was shaped by that disgraceful violation of human dignity.

I wish that I could say that human trafficking is a thing of the past. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Trafficking networks have gone global. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), victims can be found in 106 countries. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that 21 million people around the world are victims of forced labour and extreme exploitation. Annual profits are estimated to be \$150 billion. Beyond these numbers is the human toll: the lives cut short, the families and societies torn apart, and the gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Human trafficking takes many forms. Women and girls in particular are targeted again and again and again. We see brutal sexual exploitation, including forced prostitution, forced marriage and sexual slavery. We see the appalling trade in human organs. Let us also remember that modern manifestations of servitude may touch and even implicate us all. Global supply chains have transformed many lives for the better, but not always without cost. In some situations, clothes, food, smartphones, jewelry and other consumer goods may bear, wittingly or unwittingly, the traces of exploitation. Gleaming new skyscrapers may owe some of their shine to the sweat of bonded laborers.

Human trafficking thrives where the rule of law is weak or non-existent. Situations of armed conflict are especially virulent breeding grounds for human trafficking. In some of today's conflicts, we are confronted by armed groups that not only openly engage in enslavement and forced labour, but actually argue that it is legal. In Syria, Da'esh has organized slave markets and even published manuals instructing its fighters on how to capture, control and trade enslaved women and girls. The leaders of Boko Haram have also argued that slavery is legal. In other conflicts, other groups force men, women and children under their control to labour in unsafe mines, as porters and domestic servants, and on the frontlines.

Fleeing these threats, refugees and displaced people confront new ones. As people take to the road, predators take advantage. Smugglers often coerce and manipulate individuals for profit and make them victims of sex or labour trafficking. Terrorists and violent extremists use sexual enslavement as a tool for recruitment. Drug traffickers use kidnapping and ransom to finance their operations, and criminal gangs force unaccompanied children into a life of petty crime.

Moreover, impunity prevails. According to the UNODC December 2016 *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, there are hardly any convictions for crimes related to human trafficking in conflict situations or elsewhere. The lack of aggressive investigations and prosecutions only adds to the injustice, allows perpetrators to function without fear, fuels corruption and creates widespread disillusion. Allow me to make another personal reflection in that regard.

I remember that when I worked in Government, I never expected my two children to be victims of trafficking, but I always was afraid of the impact of drugs on their lives. I think that is the same with

most political leaders around the world. Most political leaders around are afraid of the impact of drugs on their families, but they do not think it likely that their families will be impact by human trafficking. That is probably why we have seen much greater priority given to fighting drug traffickers than to fighting the traffickers of human beings. Of course, drug trafficking is an awful crime, but to traffic in human beings is, I must, much worse. I believe that it is our duty to really commit ourselves to doing everything we can to make this a clear priority for all Governments and in all forms of international cooperation.

There is much that we can do both to punish human trafficking and to prevent it in the first place. A solid legal and normative framework is in place, including the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol against Trafficking in Persons, which includes the first internationally agreed definition of the crime of trafficking in persons and provides a framework for effectively preventing and combatting it. ILO conventions and the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons complement the Protocol, and are further key parts of the picture. All of these build on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Under the under the Rome Statue, enslavement can constitute a crime against humanity.

United Nations military and civilian personnel must also be held accountable to these standards. I continue to take steps to strengthen our efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse committed under the United Nations flag. Since human trafficking does not respect borders, Member States need to strengthen cooperation on law enforcement, investigations and intelligence-sharing. We also need to strengthen coordination among Member States, civil society, the business community and United Nations entities, including through the Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons. At the same time, we need to get at the underlying vulnerabilities that fuel this phenomenon, for example by empowering girls through education, by respecting the rights of minorities and by establishing safe and legal channels of migration.

The 2030 Agenda for sustainable Development can also help us break the chains of exploitation. Three of the goals explicitly address human trafficking, including sex trafficking, forced labour, child labour and the recruitment and use of child soldiers. As we engage the private sector as a key partner in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, we need to ensure it takes greater responsibility when sourcing from conflict areas. Better data will be crucial. Funding is critical. The United Nations is also committed not only to supporting victims, but to incorporating their voices and views as we develop and implement anti-trafficking interventions.

Finally, at a time of divisions in so many areas, this should be an issue that can unite us. Let us come together around the key issues of prosecution, protection and prevention, and thereby build a future without human trafficking.