

**Ms. Bhoola:**

It is an honour for me to brief the Council today in my capacity as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences. I thank the Government of the United Kingdom for convening this open debate and for the invitation to participate, as well as for its leadership in combating modern slavery.

My predecessor in the mandate and I have conducted numerous country visits to meet with a broad range of Government and civil-society organizations and survivors to assess the prevalence of slavery and related practices in contravention of the Slavery Convention of 1926 and the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery of 1956. Member States have a duty to uphold the universal protection against slavery and the slave trade and to bring perpetrators who violate this norm to justice. Nevertheless, as we have heard this morning, slavery and related practices continue to occur on an unprecedented scale, affecting millions of men, women and children. In conflict situations, terrorists and non-State armed groups have reverted to the most extreme forms of slavery, in which young girls and women are owned, exploited, sold and traded in markets and on the Internet. Boys have been forced to carry arms and commit acts of violence against their own communities.

One year ago, I and the Special Rapporteur on the right to health and Special Rapporteur on the human rights aspects of the victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, conducted a joint country mission to Nigeria, where we met with young men who had been forced by Boko Haram to carry arms, engage in combat, destroy their own villages and perform forced labour in the form of cleaning and construction work during captivity. We met girls in internally displaced persons camps, barely children themselves, who have had babies as a result of forced marriage and sexual slavery. Many of them said they were unable to return to their communities, as they were ostracized for being the wives of Boko Haram and their children were despised for being of bad blood. Despite significant Government and civil-society efforts, they continue to be affected by gaps in physical and psychological health care, food security, education, livelihood support and access to justice. Those gaps can fuel an increasing cycle of violence, in which girls are vulnerable to being forced into transactional sex in order to earn a living or, even worse, to conduct suicide bombings.

What can the Security Council do? First, the Council and member States can ensure that the multiple ways in which slavery, forced labour and trafficking all intersect in conflict receive a coherent global multifaceted response, with strong leadership within the United Nations system through continued attention to those issues and oversight on the part of the United Nations and through its Member States' responses. In that regard, I would urge Member States to engage with target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on a multi-stakeholder partnership aimed at implementing that target and which calls for the eradication of child labour, forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 8.7 is a precondition for achieving many of the other SDGs, especially those on gender equality and economic empowerment and the right to health in peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Secondly, the Council can strengthen the normative framework for ending slavery, forced labour and human trafficking by promoting increased ratifications of international human rights norms and standards, including the Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No.29) of the International Labour Organization. Member States should be reminded to ensure that dedicated legislation to ensure the implementation of international standards is backed up with robust national action plans. In addition, the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery requires ratifying States to inform the Secretary-General of laws they have adopted to prohibit slavery and criminalize enslavement, and I would encourage Security Council members to support him in upholding that role.

Thirdly, the Council can ensure the strengthening of humanitarian responses, as well as adopting the strongest financial and economic measures, to stem the transnational corruption and crime that fuels conflict.

Lastly, the Security Council can promote national and international criminal justice to bring criminals to account, including for enslavement, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Access to justice remains a remote prospect for the millions subjected to trafficking, forced labour and slavery in conflict. Prevention, protection and support for survivors are also prerequisites for the restoration of peace and security. In that regard, I would urge Member States to provide funding for the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, which prioritizes projects that provide specialized assistance to women and children subjected to slavery in conflict and humanitarian crises.