

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*):

At the outset, my country regrets that the Security Council has been unable to denounce the terrorist bombing in Damascus on Saturday. The Council must assume its responsibilities and condemn the two terrorist attacks that took place in Damascus today. The Council's work is hampered by several of its Western members. It continues to convey the message that there are two types of terrorism — moderate and extremist.

Today's meeting is an important one for my country, Syria. Today's debate should be a genuine opportunity for us to highlight trafficking in persons as one of the most dangerous threats to humankind. It is linked to the spread of terrorism, which exploits the most vulnerable in communities, in particular women and children who are victimized and fall into the trap of slavery, sexual exploitation, forced labour and trafficking in human organs.

Transnational organized criminal networks continue to exploit hundreds of thousands of immigrants and refugees who have left their homes. That is supported by a number of Governments, particularly the Government of Turkey, which continues to exploit internally displaced persons and refugees as tools for political blackmail and pressure. Before the current nefarious terrorist war, my country, Syria, had achieved much progress in the field of combating human trafficking. We became a party to many international protocols, including the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. We also promulgated our own laws, which adhere to international standards.

However, the rights of hundreds of thousands of Syrians are being violated in areas under the control of armed terrorist groups, particularly Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front. The Governments of some Member States continue to fund, arm and support those groups. They overlook the fact that those groups adhere to a takfiri Wahhabi ideology and they have a religious doctrine that calls for killing others. I would like to point to the recent report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (S/2016/361), which has documented the crimes of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in the fields of sexual exploitation and trafficking in persons. But the recommendations of the report have not been implemented.

Syrians in the areas under the control of armed terrorist groups are enslaved. Women are being abducted and are forced to marry terrorists, especially foreign terrorist fighters. Those terrorist groups have issued fatwas that allow for the sexual exploitation of women. Children are abducted and recruited before the eyes of their parents, and they become terrorists and suicide bombers. Things are not better in the refugee camps. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians live in those camps without safety and security, and the neighbouring countries that have opened those camps have not lived up to their responsibility. They are not providing a safe haven for those citizens of Syria who have escaped from the armed terrorist groups and who now are victims of human-trafficking networks.

United Nations reports, particularly the reports of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration, have pointed out that there is a continued rise in the activities of transnational organized criminals within those camps involving human trafficking, rape, the forced marriages of women and minors and organ- trafficking networks that exploit children.

Ending the phenomenon of human trafficking, one of the most heinous crimes against humanity, requires a collective international stance and commitment to dealing with the root causes of the phenomenon through the implementation of Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2331 (2016), and the provision of an enabling environment, both socially and economically, that would lead to the achievement of sustainable development for all peoples without exception.

The international community, particularly the United Nations, should shoulder its ethical and legal responsibility to find a solution for Syria by taking serious steps to implement the Security Council resolutions on terrorism. The Governments of some countries must end all support provided to armed terrorist groups. They should close their borders to mercenaries and terrorists, and we should seek an inter-Syrian solution led by Syrians without foreign intervention. We should also put an end to the unilateral coercive economic measures that have been imposed by a number of States against my country, Syria. We should create human, economic, social conditions that would enable Syrians to return to their country.