

Mr. Almahmoud (United Arab Emirates):

On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I would like to congratulate the United Kingdom on its presidency of the Council this month and its championing of efforts to combat human trafficking around the world. We hope that today's debate will contribute to a greater understanding of the role of conflict and instability in exacerbating the problem of modern slavery and offer an opportunity to exchange experiences in combating human trafficking at the national level.

This is a front-line concern in our own region, where war and displacement are rendering a significant portion of the population defenceless. Da'esh and other extremist and terrorist groups have subjugated innocent people on a horrific scale as forced combatants or as sources of revenue through their labour. But it is not just monetary gains that such groups are reaping. The exploitation of the vulnerable, particularly women, is fundamentally tied to extremist ideologies that pose an existential threat to our region and our way of life.

In order to tackle this global phenomenon, we have to start with what is possible within our national borders and build on that effort with others in a network of coalitions. As a champion of gender equality, the United Arab Emirates is particularly concerned about the disproportionate impact that this crime has on women and girls. We take that abuse of human rights very seriously and are working aggressively to combat human trafficking through law-enforcement mechanisms and dedicated institutions throughout our Government. Without addressing the shortcomings and gaps in our own legislative and normative frameworks, we could not tackle this problem head on, so in 2006 we passed a federal law — the first anti-trafficking law in the region — banning the practice of human trafficking and protecting its victims by implementing strict enforcement provisions and penalties for convicted traffickers.

However, we have discovered through experience that legal frameworks are not enough to confront this problem at its core. So in 2007, the United Arab Emirates established a national committee to combat human trafficking, implementing a multi-pronged strategy that aims to prevent the occurrence of this crime, prosecute and punish perpetrators, protect survivors and promote local, regional, and international cooperation. We also strengthened our law-enforcement ability by creating specialized units in police departments across the country for fighting trafficking. To build capacity and awareness throughout law enforcement, we instituted training sessions and workshops, including a five-month intensive course on human trafficking, the first of its kind in the Arab world.

Individuals subject to this heinous crime must be protected with shelter and counselling and must be recognized as victims, not as part of the criminal gangs that have exploited them. So we have beefed up our support for victims, whether women, men or children, by opening shelters across the Emirates that offer medical, psychological and social assistance, and by establishing a private fund to support victims' recovery and resettlement.

Given our challenging regional context, our national and multilateral defences must evolve as quickly as the traffickers' criminal offences do. That is why it is critical to ensure regional cooperation on anti-trafficking alongside our international engagement. Looking ahead, I would like to propose three recommendations for combating human trafficking that could be applied at the international level, and specifically with regard to the crises in our region.

The first is on prevention. While we must tackle trafficking within our own borders, we must also cooperate with the countries where trafficking originates. This means working with Governments to ensure legitimate migration channels, as well as focusing on preventing circumstances that open the door for traffickers to exploit individuals, by promoting the rule of law in order to protect citizens and by

offering them economic opportunities. The prevention that results from achieving sustainable and inclusive development for all is essential to tackling the root causes of this issue.

Secondly, the agencies combating modern slavery are facing challenges as numerous as they are complex. Because of that, multilateral institutions, including the United Nations, must take the lead in improving international cooperation between the private and public sectors and between Governments and international institutions. When we adopt the forthcoming global compact on safe, regular, and orderly migration, it must include provisions that address modern slavery.

Lastly, we urge the Security Council to enhance its response to human trafficking, which is a problem linked to violent extremism and terrorism. We support the Council's full use of the instruments at its disposal to combat the wrath of the groups that are exploiting the vulnerable and fomenting conflict. It is only when the community of nations truly works together that we can holistically confront and eradicate this grave threat to international peace and security.