

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine):

We commend the United Kingdom for convening today's debate and keeping the issue of trafficking in persons in conflict on the Security Council's agenda. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution that the Spanish presidency of the Security Council for December 2016 has made to the discussion of the issue.

Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union, and I would like to personally align myself with everything that was said by my Swedish colleague, Minister Regnér. I particularly deplore the hypocrisy and lip service that many Governments display with regard to the plight of the women and girls who are major victims of human trafficking. I urge that they abandon such behaviour and get down to business.

The issue of human trafficking has been on the radar of the United Nations for decades. However, in recent years, we have seen a significant evolution in the forms that trafficking in persons takes, especially in conflict and post-conflict situations. Like the deadliest kinds of viruses, some forms of trafficking mutate to the extent that they become immune to the actions and mechanisms that are in place but that lag behind the crimes they are supposed to prevent.

Trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation is still the most widespread form of trafficking, and the majority of its victims are women and girls. That is why we need to think about a more gender-specific, targeted approach in all actions against trafficking.

Another aspect of the issue is that persons displaced by conflict, including refugees, can be especially vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation. In that regard, Ukraine fully supports the commitments in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants to combatting human trafficking, including through targeted measures to identify, protect and assist victims, and to prevent human trafficking among those affected by displacement, taking into account the particular vulnerabilities of women and children.

Trafficking is a transnational threat that requires a transnational response, including from this Council. It is encouraging that the Council addressed this issue in its December 2015 presidential statement (S/PRST/2015/25) and adopted resolution 2331 (2016) last December. We must build on that momentum. Both the presidential statement and the resolution stressed the need to ensure that trafficked persons are treated as victims of crime and are not penalized for their compelled involvement in the unlawful activities of the perpetrators.

Widespread impunity is unacceptable because the repetition of such crimes creates a vicious circle of delinquency. Along with provision of psychological, social and medical support to victims, we see the fight against impunity as a key priority area.

Following on the statement of the Secretary-General, I insist that human trafficking should be seen as a threat to international security, at least equal to trafficking in drugs and arms. For traffickers, human beings are just a commodity that can be sold for profit. The channels they use today for human trafficking may be used tomorrow for arms smuggling or transporting terrorists, if greater profit is promised. The international community should therefore unite its efforts to eliminate those channels, treating them as a real danger.

The fight against this horrendous phenomenon is at the top of the agenda of Ukrainian Government activities in the field of human rights. In 1998, the International Organization for Migration launched

the Counter-Trafficking Programme in Ukraine, with a view to supporting Government and civil society efforts to combat trafficking in human beings and to ensure victims' access to assistance and justice.

Over the past decade, Ukraine has made a number of important steps towards the establishment of a viable nationwide counter-trafficking response, setting up a Government-owned national referral mechanism to identify, assist and protect victims of trafficking. Ukraine has acceded to the main international legal instruments aimed at combating human trafficking and now has a solid national legal framework to address that disgraceful and dangerous phenomenon.

Let me note, however, that all of the aforementioned documents currently cannot be properly implemented in non-Government-controlled areas of Ukraine. As Commissioner Hyland stated here today, conflict is the major driver of modern slavery around the globe. Three years of Russian aggression against Ukraine have led to an increased risk of human trafficking in the affected areas. We have already seen numerous cases of human trafficking and forced labour — and even slavery — in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions outside the control of the Government.

But those cases remain largely unaddressed due to the lack of both safe access and proper attention by monitoring missions, especially the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross. It is therefore important that those international presences in Ukraine include the relevant activities in their monitoring work in non-Government-controlled areas. We also call on those organizations to provide relevant training to field staff working there and to include all cases of human rights violations in that area in their regular reporting.

The situation is particularly complicated by the 400-kilometre section of the State border with the Russian Federation that is out of Ukraine's control and is widely used for the inflow of weapons, ammunition and fighters into the zone of conflict. The victims and perpetrators of trafficking in persons are also moving across that uncontrolled section of the border. In that connection, we have to be aware that Russia does not have comprehensive mechanisms for effective investigation, prosecution and punishment of perpetrators in accordance the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. Today, of all member States of the Council of Europe, only Russia has neither signed nor ratified that Convention, which was opened for signature and ratification 12 years ago.

Trafficking is a blatant violation of human rights, an offense against the dignity and integrity of a person. The success of our common fight against that scourge requires the effort of all concerned. A long-term solution can only emerge from consistent political commitment and the joint action of the international community to eradicate human trafficking, to promote justice and accountability, and to protect victims.