

**Mr. Bermúdez** (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*):

At the outset, we would like to thank you, Mr. Mariano Rajoy Brey, President of the Government of Spain, for presiding over today's open debate. I also thank the briefers for their comprehensive statements. We congratulate Spain on having convened this open debate, which is of particular importance in the current context, given the unprecedented mass migration crisis, with refugees and internally displaced persons becoming the main targets of traffickers.

Trafficking in persons in situations of conflict is a global problem. It concerns not only the countries of origin, but also the transit and destination countries of victims, the countries in which those criminal networks operate and those through which money passes for those networks. And the list could continue.

Human trafficking is a means of subjugating and using human beings for profit. It gravely violates their human rights. Through abuses and violence, it degrades the victims' human condition and turns them into commodities. It removes their physical and emotional integrity. It is a threat to all of society and affects the well-being of communities and the security of nations. According to the *World Report on Human Trafficking* of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), that phenomenon affects practically all regions of the world. UNODC has identified at least 510 flows of transnational trafficking in persons. Most of those victims are targeted for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

Those conflicts and humanitarian crises only increase the risks of human trafficking. They find fertile ground in economic desperation and in the weakening of the rule of law and fewer social services. As a result, people are forced to leave their homes, and even their countries of residence. In that regard, when a country is in a situation of conflict, the rule of law in its territory can be weakened. That creates greater freedom of action for those organizations that seek to exploit the institutional weaknesses for their illegal activities, such as human trafficking. Even if we deem that today one of the main elements that creates human trafficking situations in conflict situations is the self-described Islamic State and its associated groups, we need to bear in mind that those crimes are also perpetrated by other actors that operate in the same violent manner in others regions of the world.

Resolution 2231 (2016), which we have unanimously adopted today, which Uruguay co-sponsored, roundly condemns human trafficking in armed conflict-affected areas. That is a cross-cutting and multifaceted phenomenon. Unfortunately, it is being replicated and it is affecting very fragile areas of the world where people are living in situations of high vulnerability. Uruguay wishes to highlight several elements in the resolution that we believe are extremely important.

First, the resolution calls for ratifying and implementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, as well as the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Those agreements make up the international legal framework of rules and obligations to ensure that States develop international instruments to combat trafficking in persons.

Secondly, the resolution highlights the need for cooperation and exchange of information. In that regard, Uruguay positively views the growing connection between the work of UNODC, the Secretary-General and the Security Council, since increasingly trafficking in persons is linked to armed conflicts and threats to international peace and security. We welcome the work of UNODC as the guardian of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, including the Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.

Thirdly, the resolution addresses sexual violence and the strengthening of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Uruguay condemns the use of sexual violence by any party as a terrorist tactic to further such an agenda. Those practices have led to the development of a growing nexus between trafficking in persons and conflict, thereby violating the rights of

thousands of women and children within the context of war.

Another significant aspect is training. The complexity of human trafficking means there needs to be greater awareness, in addition to specialized training within that scope for as many people as possible, but especially for the officials and points of contact to whom it is most likely victims will turn, such as police and military officers, help centres, consulates and embassies, among others.

Furthermore, we recognize the role of civil society in providing assistance and support to victims. In that regard, Uruguay has concluded drafting a comprehensive preliminary bill to prevent and fight trafficking in and exploitation of persons that underscores the human rights of the victims as a top priority. It also calls upon diplomatic missions to engage in trafficking prevention activities, promote training for staff, make available information easily accessible and create support initiatives for victims. Moreover, the resolution emphasizes the need to reintegrate victims into society and adopt mechanisms to protect and support them.

Uruguay, as a country committed to promoting, protecting and upholding human rights, wishes to underpin the need to provide comprehensive assistance to the victims of trafficking in persons. We must focus on their recovery and reintegration into society, and not just penalize the crime in question. The victims must receive assistance and legal and psycho-social protection. Furthermore, for Uruguay, it is key that the victims of

human trafficking not be punished for crimes that they may have committed, if it is determined that they were subjected to trafficking at the time of committing those crimes.

Uruguay also believes that activities related to trafficking in persons not be restricted to the time period of a given conflict. The frameworks for action in the wake of armed conflict are also lacking in terms of shortcomings within the justice system and compliance with the law, in addition to an organized civil society that can file complaints about such situations. That is why our country believes that the work of UNODC and the Security Council should be carried out in close coordination with the Peacebuilding Commission with a view to preventing territories in post-conflict situations from turning into fertile grounds for criminal organizations.

By way of conclusion, we believe, in short, that fighting trafficking in persons in conflict situations requires efforts and cooperation from the international community as a whole in order to address the needs of those who are most vulnerable, such as women and children. To that end, we must take appropriate action both internally and internationally. We must recognize that we are the ones that are responsible for effecting real change, which we can do by taking a broad, comprehensive and multifaceted approach to the issue of trafficking in persons in conflict situations, something that requires determination and political will. The international community can count on Uruguay's firm commitment in that vein.