

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

I should like first of all to thank the delegation of the United Kingdom for convening this debate. I am also grateful to Secretary-General António Guterres, the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mr. Yury Fedotov, Mr. Kevin Hyland and Ms. Ilwad Elman, for their comprehensive briefings.

I would like to highlight four points in my statement: first, the time frame and the geographic area where human trafficking, forced labour, slavery and other similar practices take place; secondly, the root causes of these problems; thirdly, what can be done to combat them; and fourthly, the importance of victim support.

First, with regard to the time frame and the geographic area, human trafficking, forced labour and so-called modern slavery are social and political aberrations that we see in a very great number of countries, and in many cases in countries where supposedly there is social peace. Unfortunately, the absence of conflict is no guarantee of the absence of these scourges. However, when these practices are carried out in situations of conflict or weakness, the victims find themselves in a situation of even greater vulnerability in the face of the actions of terrorists and criminal networks. It is necessary to bear in mind that the geographic areas in which these practices are generally carried out transcends those where the conflict is unfolding, including neighbouring countries and even distant countries. In addition, the time frame goes well beyond the duration of conflicts, and the consequences of these practices are suffered by the victims for the rest of their lives.

It is fundamental that the international community expressed its full-throated condemnation of human trafficking when we unanimously adopted resolution 2331 (2016) last December, on the occasion of the open debate organized by the delegation of Spain (see S/PV.7847). Human trafficking is an aberrant practice in all its forms and manifestations and whatever its purpose. Trafficking in persons represents a serious abuse of human rights that denigrates its victims, stripping them of their human condition to the detriment of the interests of the criminal and terrorist networks operating throughout the world. Uruguay welcomes the growing link between the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Secretary-General and the Security Council, and we would highlight coordination with the Peacebuilding Commission in order to prevent areas that are in a post-conflict situation from becoming a fertile ground for the actions of criminal organizations.

Secondly, we need to address the structural causes that lead to conflicts. The absence of State authority, the lack of guarantees, poverty, inequality in all its aspects, and the lack of access to education or political participation, generate vacuums that are filled by terrorist organizations and human trafficking. Not only do these organizations take advantage of the absence or instability of a State that cannot fulfil its primary responsibility for protecting its inhabitants, but they also play on the desperation of the population affected.

Thirdly, in dealing with trafficking in persons in the context of armed conflict, we must remember that many of these scenarios are taking place in areas where peacekeeping operations are deployed. We therefore note the importance and appropriateness of these operations having adequate mandates to identify, protect and assist the victims of human trafficking, to monitor and report on such situations, and to support authorities in developing their capacities. It is also important for States to comply with the provisions of the relevant international instruments.

The adoption of the Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, was a particularly important step in understanding the issue and in making States aware of their responsibilities to address the problem in a comprehensive manner, both in terms of the prevention and protection of victims and in investigating and punishing traffickers. We

call on all those countries that have not done so to accede to the Protocol and ratify the conventions of the International Labour Organization on forced labour and the abolition of forced labour in order to prevent the proliferation of such practices.

States must also adopt the national measures necessary to monitor and hold the perpetrators accountable. We must keep in mind that, according to estimates of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), some 60 per cent of trafficking victims identified throughout the world are foreign to the country where they have been identified. Such data confirm that no country is exempt from the responsibility to identify and eventually punish those responsible.

Fourthly and finally, in relation to the situation of victims, Uruguay wishes to highlight the need for comprehensive assistance for victims of trafficking. The focus should be on their recovery and reintegration into society. Victims should receive legal and psychosocial assistance and protection that address their specific needs. The rights of victims of trafficking should be at the centre of the entire endeavour to prevent and combat trafficking in persons. The traffic in people affects all sectors of the population, but there are certain social groups that suffer disproportionately. In this context, and as reported by Unodc, almost one-third of victims are children and more than 70 per cent are girls and women.

In conclusion, I wish to highlight the importance of cooperation among States in combatting trafficking in persons and in judging and condemning those responsible.