

Ms. Cash (Australia):

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of Canada, New Zealand and my own country, Australia. We thank the United Kingdom for convening this debate.

Every country in the world is affected by the scourge of modern slavery, either through local exploitation or as a point of origin, transit or destination for trafficking victims. Eradicating slavery and sexual violence, in particular in conflict situations, is an essential precondition for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and must be addressed as a matter of urgency. We have a shared responsibility to disrupt this evil trade and address its root causes. No single State or organization can do that alone. Our individual efforts are important; however, regional and global cooperation will be the key to success.

We know that conflict and instability and the resulting economic desperation amplify the risk of forced labour for vulnerable people. In Australia, I recently established the Migrant Worker Task Force, which will develop strategies and make improvements to stamp out the exploitation of vulnerable workers. We have also launched an inquiry into whether Australia should follow the United Kingdom's lead and adopt legislation to combat modern slavery. And Australia's bid for membership in the Human Rights Council for the period 2018-2020 reflects our strong commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights internationally.

Canada has taken a strong stance on the prevention of all forms of exploitation and violence against women and girls in situations of conflict. In particular, Canada will welcome approximately 1,200 vulnerable Yazidi women and children who have been subjected to the most heinous forms of sexual exploitation. New Zealand has secured a landmark trafficking conviction, which resulted in a substantial sentence and an order to pay reparations. New Zealand is also currently planning to expand and update its national plan of action to combat trafficking, in order to incorporate slavery and forced labour.

The International Labour Organization estimates that 21 million people worldwide are subject to forced labour. More than 56 per cent of them are in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia and New Zealand are working with countries in the region to stamp out those barbaric and criminal practices. We work in partnership with civil society and regional forums to eliminate the drivers of vulnerability, build the capacity of local authorities and assist victims of those terrible crimes. That includes addressing transnational crime and corruption and strengthening governance frameworks and criminal justice systems.

A key element in that effort is the Bali Process. The Bali Declaration recognizes the critical need to engage with the private sector, including by promoting and implementing humane, non-abusive labour practices throughout supply chains. Later this year, the Bali Process Business Forum will bring together Ministers and private-sector leaders from the 45 member countries of the Bali process to discuss policy approaches to tackling human trafficking and slavery and to share experiences on best practices.

We need a global anti-trafficking strategy and better coordination of data and funding. We must encourage and support United Nations efforts to strengthen coordination and develop a more strategic and coherent international response. Alliance 8.7 provides an important platform to advance our international cooperation and programmes. It will assist all States Members of the United Nations to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and all forms of child labour. Australia and Canada are proud to be part of the Group of Friends of Decent Work for Sustainable Development, and I encourage all Members to join.

We should also ensure that the 2017 review of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons makes a practical contribution.

Every country in the world is affected by the blight of modern slavery. We must be focused, committed and coordinated in stamping it out.