

**Ms. Vassiliadou:**

I thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon; the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Mr. Yury Fedotov; the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura; the civilian activist for Yazidi women's rights, Ms. Ameena Saeed Hasan; and the Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking, Ms. Nadia Murad Basee Taha, for their briefings.

I speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization

and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

We would like to congratulate Spain on convening this open ministerial debate, as well as to commend its keen commitment to addressing trafficking in human beings in conflict throughout its mandate as a member of the Security Council. This may mark the end of Spain's term, but it also marks a beginning in this area. We must build on the momentum.

Trafficking in human beings is a threat to human and national security, peace, human rights, democratic governance, the rule of law and socioeconomic development. Trafficking in human beings is a grave violation of human dignity, specifically prohibited under article 5 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. It is also a form of serious transnational organized crime, with huge human social and economic costs. It is driven by the demand for all forms of exploitation and by very high profits, in both legal and illegal economies, resulting in a complex interplay between supply and demand that must be addressed if the crime is to be eradicated.

We remain strongly committed to eradicating trafficking in human beings, which requires a transnational response. The United Nations provides an excellent forum for that. The European Union has placed multilateralism at the core of its new Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy. We stand behind the commitments in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants to combat human trafficking.

We welcome the reports of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2016/361 and S/2016/361/Rev.1) and on the implementation of measures to counter trafficking in persons (S/2016/949). We especially note the nexus between conflict- and post-conflict-related sexual violence and human trafficking. In that context, trafficking takes many despicable forms, from sexual slavery to labour exploitation or organ removal. The list is long and gruesome. We are concerned by the references to armed

groups that regard the civilian population as a resource to be exploited, viewing women's sexuality and fertility as commodities to be trafficked and traded as part of the political economy of war.

Importantly, trafficking is gender-specific. The most recent EU data show that trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is still the most widespread form and that the majority of its victims are women and girls. In that respect, we call for a more gender-specific, targeted approach in all actions against trafficking.

It is clear that we must focus on the prevention of trafficking in human beings in all its forms. Any other approach will come too late for the victims, as we have heard today. In that connection, ensuring accountability for the perpetrators is essential. We cannot accept a culture of impunity. By cracking down on the profits generated, we can strike a decisive blow. In order to do so, we must follow the financial trails and use all available investigative tools to prosecute the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

By upholding and promoting international standards, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols, in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and other international legal instruments, we contribute to ensuring strong foundations for the rule of law. We are working closely with UNODC in that respect via joint programmes. One such action is the joint European Union-UNODC Global Action to Prevent and Address Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants, launched in January in partnership with the International Organization for Migration and UNICEF, as mentioned in the report (S/2016/949) of the Secretary-General.

We remain committed to the implementation of the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, as defined in the Secretary-General's Bulletin (ST/SGB/2003/13) on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

While recognizing that we are faced with human displacement on the largest scale in human history, we acknowledge that the issue of human mobility goes beyond any one crisis. We live in a world of 7 billion people, with demographic imbalances and growing inequalities.

The European Union is honouring its responsibilities. Since 2015, our vessels have saved thousands of people in the Mediterranean Sea. Thanks to a mandate from the Security Council, Operation Sophia is disrupting traffickers' and smugglers' networks.

It is well known that Da'esh uses sexual violence systematically to fund its operations.

That includes kidnapping for ransom and the sale of women and girls through human trafficking and slave markets. We recognize that instability creates an ideal environment for the criminal activities of traffickers. We are therefore actively supporting all efforts led by the United Nations to bring an end to the political and security crises in Syria and Libya. We need to strengthen our comprehensive policies and strategies aimed at empowering the role of women in society, and better understand their specific needs and their role in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. Measures need to be taken in order to prevent and address the use of new technologies as tools for recruiting victims of trafficking, including in conflict areas and by terrorist groups.

We emphasize the significant advancement in international justice made by the International Criminal Court, as well as by non-permanent international criminal tribunals, in combating sexual violence in conflict. Nevertheless, we bear in mind that the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court is complementary to the jurisdiction of States and that the primary responsibility for bringing perpetrators to justice resides with States. At the national level, accountability and transitional justice mechanisms are also key.

The EU has built an ambitious, gender-specific and comprehensive legal and policy framework to combat trafficking in human beings. Anti-trafficking actions also form a key part of our external policies and funding. The EU will continue to develop partnerships to address trafficking in human beings.

There is a market for trafficked human merchandise. We need to put an end to traffickers' impunity. Effectively preventing this heinous crime necessitates reducing the demand and incentives for the trafficking of human beings. Accountability and collective efforts are needed to put an end to this terrible crime.

A full version of my statement has been submitted to the Secretariat.