

**Mrs. Natividad (Philippines):**

I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on trafficking in persons in conflict situations, with a focus on forced labour, slavery and other similar practices.

About a year ago, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, addressed the Council and said that

“trafficking in persons in conflict and crisis situations is not a mere possibility or isolated incident; rather, it happens on a regular basis as a consequence of conflict” (*S/PV.7704, p. 6*).

It must therefore be seen and addressed as a systemic outcome of conflict. Conflict-related trafficking is, however, rarely detected, and even less often addressed. That observation is shared by our Philippine inter-agency council against trafficking, which acknowledges the existence of trafficking in persons incidents in conflict areas in the Philippines, but faces the difficulty of tracking those incidents.

The Philippines has adopted a one-country team and multistakeholder approach to trafficking in persons that consolidates the mandates, efforts, resources and interests of the duty-bearers and stakeholders to come up with a robust response. That has resulted in promoting awareness and the mainstreaming of interventions, down to the grass-roots level. Realizing the increased vulnerability of populations in conflict areas, the Government has activated a structure called the gender-based violence cluster, composed mainly of law enforcers and social welfare service providers who specialize in gender issues, and civil society representatives. The cluster is tasked to address the needs of women and children in conflict situations, especially in mitigating vulnerabilities to sexual violence and trafficking. The cluster develops and implements programmes for access to protective information, psychosocial and trauma-informed care, protective custody and access to education and economic opportunities.

The issue of child soldiers, especially young men and boys, is also of serious concern to the Philippine Government. The Government considers the recruitment and use of children as soldiers as a grave case of violation of child rights. In that regard, our efforts are focused on preventing their recruitment, investigating allegations of recruitment, holding the perpetrators accountable and training front-line officers in appropriate methods to assist children rescued from armed groups.

To address the problem of human trafficking as a means to finance the activities of terrorists, armed groups and transnational organized crime networks, it is important to examine trafficking corridors and the business flow of trafficking. That approach has enabled the Philippines to strategically locate victims and traffickers in the entire process, especially at critical points of intervention where victims are the most visible and can be rescued. It also allows the identification of critical points in the business flow to deal the strongest blow to the operations of trafficking syndicates and to expose and develop strategies to arrest new means employed by traffickers.

The Philippine Government has made it a priority to provide our migrant workers with protection from human trafficking and exploitation. That protection is provided through national laws, international arrangements, cooperation with destination countries and initiatives in multilateral forums. Recently, we have worked with the United States, the International Organization for Migration and other partners on the Migrants in Countries in Crisis initiative to improve responses to assist migrants in countries experiencing conflict or natural disaster. The guidelines, principles and practices leverage the competencies and strengths of various stakeholders to save lives, increase protection and decrease the vulnerabilities of migrants, including from trafficking. The global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration also provides us with an opportunity to strengthen international

cooperation to allow migrants to move across borders safely and prevent them from falling into the arms of traffickers.

The very nature of human trafficking requires cross- border cooperation. Member States need to strengthen international coordination on information-sharing, law enforcement, border control and judicial systems, and to learn important lessons to enhance their own national action plans to more effectively combat the problem. Criminal networks, armed groups and terrorists groups must not be allowed to further thrive in situations of instability and chaos, to prey on the fear, hardship and misery of others caught in conflict and post-conflict situations, or to profit from activities such as forced labour, slavery and other forms of exploitation.