

Mr. Mendonça e Moura (Portugal):

I would like to thank the Spanish presidency for convening this ministerial open debate and congratulate you, Mr. President, on the adoption of the first Security Council resolution on trafficking in human beings in situations of conflict, which my country is proud to co-sponsor (resolution 2331 (2016)).

I thank the Secretary-General, the Executive Director of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Ms. Zainab Bangura, Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, for their briefings.

Trafficking in human beings is one of the most serious violations of human rights and constitutes an offence to the dignity and integrity of the human being. Every year, millions of men, women and children are victims of human trafficking for exploitation, which includes prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor and services, slavery and similar practices, involuntary servitude, and removal of organs and other forms of exploitation. It is a complex reality, transnational in most cases, often committed within the framework of criminal organizations, which prey on vulnerabilities and weaknesses of trafficked persons. Trafficking in human beings is often exacerbated in situations of conflict and humanitarian crisis and aggravated by factors such as poverty, unemployment, weak rule of law and poor governance.

We note with concern that trafficking in persons in situations of conflict-related sexual violence has become a war tactic by violent extremist groups. It turns individuals into commodities, dehumanizes them and exacerbates the multiple and protracted harmful effects of conflict-related violence on victims. And it must be stressed that a consistent mark of this crime is that most victims are women and girls.

Any intervention, to be effective, must be based on common and coordinated efforts in the fields of prevention, awareness-raising, support, research and repression at the international, regional or national levels. Bilateral, regional and international cooperation among countries of origin, transit and destination, as well as effective information-sharing, are crucial to addressing human trafficking resulting from conflict. It is a global issue that demands collective action, not only from national Governments, but also from the international community, civil-society organizations, media, academia and other stakeholders.

The crime of trafficking in persons is generally underreported and underrecorded. The overwhelming majority of victims of trafficking never see justice for what they have endured, nor receive the assistance and support they need. We must fight the culture of impunity for those who commit these crimes; those responsible must be brought to justice. To this end, law-enforcement and other officials need to be trained to identify

and protect victims, and traffickers and their accomplices need to be prosecuted, and justice for victims needs to be secured.

Portugal urges all delegations that have not yet done so to accede and ratify the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The Protocol provides a broad basis for policies to address the issue and requires countries to take action against the traffickers, protect and assist the victims and help prevent trafficking. My delegation looks forward to the high-level review of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, set to take place in 2017.

In 2007, with the involvement of several sectorial ministries, the private sector and civil-society organizations, we in Portugal developed its first National Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings. In 2008, we created the Trafficking in Human Beings Observatory with the goal of collecting and analysing data on trafficking. Our third National Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings, for 2014-2017, is currently being implemented and entails 53 policy measures focused around five strategic areas: first, prevention, awareness-raising, information and research; secondly, education and training; thirdly, protection, intervention and capacity-building; fourthly, criminal investigation; and fifthly and finally, cooperation. The third National Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings reflects my country's commitments, in particular within the framework of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Union and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries. The national efforts developed by Portugal in combating trafficking in human beings have been recognized in several forums, and most recently by the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

In conclusion, trafficking in human beings is one of the most heinous crimes against human dignity. Preventing and punishing trafficking in human beings is crucial to achieving a future of dignity, freedom for all and sustainable development, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and our collective efforts aimed at consolidating peace and security.