

**Mr. Matjila (South Africa):**

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, and the delegation of the United Kingdom for having convened this timely open debate on trafficking in persons in conflict situations, forced labour and other similar practices.

We wish to begin by commending the Secretary-General for his November 2016 report on the implementation of measures to combat trafficking in persons (S/2016/949) and the recommendations contained therein.

In almost every conflict situation throughout the world, human trafficking thrives. It has been established that illicit trafficking in drugs, stolen antiques and small arms and light weapons often follows the same routes used by human traffickers. These activities threaten international peace and security, for instance by sustaining terrorism as well as criminal and armed groups. My delegation is mindful of the fact that one of the highest risks to displaced persons is the threat of being trafficked, especially refugees fleeing from conflict.

Trafficking operations often flourish in circumstances where institutions and law-enforcement capabilities are eroded and weakened by sustained conflict. This undermines the rule of law, which in turn contributes to the other forms of transnational organized crime, exacerbating conflict and insecurity. This is a vicious circle that requires from us united, concerted, sustained and cooperative efforts, whose ultimate objective is to address conflict, including its root causes. This requires that we address development challenges as well as external interventions, such as those we have recently witnessed in Libya, Iraq and Syria, which have led to the proliferation of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Africa awaits with keen interest the appraisal of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, which will follow in the wake of the international community's efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on trafficking in persons. These are important steps forward in galvanizing our joint response to countering human trafficking, and we welcome them wholeheartedly.

South Africa also wishes to recognize and remind Member States of the role of the African Union, which has paid specific attention to the issue of trafficking in persons. In 1981, the African Union adopted the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, which prohibits slavery and human trafficking. The Charter is further complemented by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which make specific provisions for the protection of women and children against slavery.

Furthermore, the Ouagadougou Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children, adopted by the African Union in 2006, reaffirmed the provisions, provided for an international instrument on human trafficking and encouraged African States to adopt legislation and institutional measures to combat trafficking in human beings.

South Africa has signed and ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. This Convention provided valuable guidance to South Africa in the creation of the Prevention and Combatting of Trafficking in Persons Act of 2013, which is South Africa's first comprehensive legislation on human trafficking, which among other things seeks to implement South Africa's international obligations with regard to this challenge.

In 2016, the Global Action to Prevent and Address Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants was launched internationally. South Africa was one of the first 13 countries identified to participate in this important initiative. On 22 September 2016, the South African Government and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime jointly launched this initiative, which strongly emphasized South Africa's firm commitment to countering trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that South Africa remains highly concerned and seized with the matter of human trafficking within our borders, but equally within our region, continent and elsewhere in the world. The particular impact that the trafficking in persons in situations of armed conflict has on women and children, increasing their vulnerability to gender-based and sexual violence, is of particular concern. The fact that more people are presently displaced today than at any other time since the Second World War is a huge challenge, which exposes people worldwide to a range of human rights violations, including trafficking. Working within its mandate, the Security Council should take an assertive and decisive stance in their prevention so that even islands of terrorism, trafficking, armed groups can no longer be allowed to profit in any way from human trafficking.