

Ms. Regnér (Sweden):

Sweden aligns itself with the statements to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and the representative of Norway, on behalf of the Nordic countries.

Combating brutal human rights violations by trafficking in persons must be a priority for us all. It is our common responsibility. Sweden remains strongly committed to eradicating all forms of trafficking in persons. We would therefore like to congratulate the United Kingdom on organizing this ministerial open debate.

Today's debate is important for many reasons. First, we need to ensure that this issue remains on the global agenda. Today's discussion builds on the momentum created under the Spanish presidency of the Council. Secondly, we need to move forward with actions in line with resolution 2331 (2016). Finally, trafficking in persons is a transnational threat that requires a transnational response. The United Nations provides a unique forum for achieving this goal.

Human trafficking and various forms of slavery are flourishing. This is due to ongoing conflicts and massive displacement of civilian populations, such as the situation in the Lake Chad basin region, which the Council visited two weeks ago. It flourishes because there are those ready to cruelly exploit others in desperate situations. The most effective way to end human trafficking is to address its root causes. The root cause is demand. For example, should there be no persons — the majority of them men — ready to buy sexual services, there would be no trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Another root cause, of course, is conflict and displacement. We need to prevent them, as we heard not least in the excellent briefing on Somalia. We have to prevent them before they occur, and we have to invest in equitable sustainable development for all. These are important measures to combat human trafficking. Existing international obligations relating to human trafficking and forced labour must also be fully implemented.

The Council has an important role to play in prevention, including through the sustaining peace agenda. In addition, peace operations mandated by the Council must see the role that organized criminal groups, as well as terrorist groups, play in perpetuating the unstable situations and conflicts that lead to human trafficking, and in human trafficking itself. Working on the ground to create accountable and effective security sector institutions can enhance the capacity of Member States to address these groups.

As the Secretary-General has previously reported, there is a clear nexus between conflict- and post-conflict-related sexual violence and human trafficking, such as sexual slavery, forced labour and organ removal. The list is long. I will, however, focus on sexual exploitation predominantly targeting women, and girls and boys.

The effects of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation are different from the harm caused by trafficking for other forms of exploitation. Recognizing that human trafficking has a clear gender dimension is therefore essential. All actions against trafficking should have a gender approach.

Sweden wants to stress the importance of not creating legal markets for human traffickers. There is an ongoing discussion within the United Nations and elsewhere about whether prostitution should be viewed as a profession. The term "sex worker" is often used in these discussions. Swedish policy on

this issue is clear. Prostitution can never be regarded as a job; prostitution is exploitation. Sweden urges more countries to consider legislation that targets the person who buys sex and offers support to the person being exploited, thereby shifting the criminal focus and guilt from the person being exploited to the exploiter. Knowledge about one's own rights, including about sexual and reproductive health and rights, is crucial.

Another essential element is accountability in conflict and post-conflict environments. Sweden strongly supports the implementation of the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse.

As Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we would also like to stress the particularly vulnerable situation of children in this regard, and also highlight the forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflicts as one of the worst forms of child labour. Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals asks us to eliminate this and we need to keep a strong focus on achieving this goal. We should also focus on Goal 5, on gender equality, and on the other relevant Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sweden is also proud to be a pathfinder country in the United Nations Global Partnership to End Violence against Children. It is a critical initiative, and Sweden would like to urge more countries to join it.

Finally, we must enable women and girls to make decisions about their own bodies, lives and futures in all contexts. We must engage more women both in peacebuilding activities and in action against trafficking. By implementing the agenda on women and peace and security, we can ensure that women's voices, experiences and solutions are brought to the table. Gender equality is about human rights.