

The Secretary-General:

I thank the Spanish presidency of the Council, led by His Excellency Mr. Rajoy Brey, for convening this important meeting. I come with a plea for Member States to take steps to help victims of trafficking today and prevent further cases in the future. That means attention to immediate crimes and underlying causes.

Trafficking is a global problem, but the most vulnerable people are those caught in conflict: women, children, internally displaced persons and refugees. War provides oxygen to terrorist groups. It gives them space to flourish. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and others are using trafficking and sexual violence as weapons of terror and an important source of revenue. Both ISIL and Boko Haram have engaged in the sexual enslavement of women and girls through trafficking. Yazidi girls captured in Iraq are trafficked into Syria and sold in open slave markets as if they were things, not people.

Before the conflict in Syria began, there were few, if any, human trafficking victims from that country. Now, victims from Syria — along with Iraq, Somalia and other conflict-torn countries — are found in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Traumatized Syrian refugee children are being forced to work. Instead of studying and playing, they are sewing clothes, serving food and selling items on the street. We have to fight trafficking for the sake of the victims. When we do, we will also decrease funding for terrorists and make everyone safer. We need action on two fronts.

The first is justice and accountability. These are heinous crimes that demand immediate international action. International law needs to be respected and implemented. The United Nations is actively engaged in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by peacekeepers. States must also train peacekeepers and others to respond to trafficking in persons and prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. We should intensify training on preventing trafficking in persons as well as sexual exploitation and abuse.

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime is a vital tool. I call on all States that are not party to its Protocol on trafficking in persons to join right away. I also urge countries to adopt dedicated anti-trafficking laws and national action plans. States should consider creating

multidisciplinary law-enforcement units or specialized prosecutors' offices to address this threat.

Some States have successfully suppressed trafficking syndicates by targeting money-laundering and criminal proceeds. We should step up this action. Governments have to respond, especially when their own nationals are involved.

I call on all States to investigate and prosecute such cases, including those in which their own nationals commit this crime abroad. All perpetrators must be brought to justice.

The problem of trafficking is international in nature, and only an international response can succeed. The United Nations is bringing together Governments, other organizations and civil-society groups. I call for increased support to United Nations entities that are confronting the problem of trafficking.

I encourage contributions to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. These initiatives are helping victims to heal and become agents of change.

The second front is human rights and stability. If conflict gives oxygen to traffickers, human rights and stability suffocate them. That is why it is so important to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda promises a life of dignity for all people and focuses on helping the farthest behind first. To fulfil this promise, we have to stand for the human rights of all victims and vulnerable people.

I call for all countries to ratify all international human rights, refugee, labour rights and crime-prevention conventions, and to put efforts into their effective implementation.

The majority of trafficking victims are women and girls. Our response must include special attention to their rights. States must adopt gender-sensitive and rights-based migration policies. We need strategic leadership in ending war and also in preventing conflicts and sustaining peace. That is why I have strengthened the commitment of the United Nations to supporting Member States in early action and in preventive diplomacy.

As this may be my last speech to the Council, let me emphasize once again that prevention should be at the forefront. I welcome my successor's focus on this very important priority. Let us work together to help today's victims of trafficking while creating a more stable and just world for all.