

**UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
National Committee to Combat
Human Trafficking**



United Arab Emirates

**دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة
اللجنة الوطنية
لمكافحة الاتجار بالبشر**

**Speech of HE Dr. Anwar Mohammed Gargash
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs
and
Chairman of the
National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking**

at

**The United Nations General Assembly
Thematic Debate on Human Trafficking**

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Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to be here today and delighted to represent the United Arab Emirates in addressing this gathering. We all share a common objective – to eradicate the global crime of human trafficking. This debate is one of the many important steps towards that objective.

I would like to thank the organisers of this event for making this discussion possible, creating a unique opportunity for a multilateral vision to eradicate this heinous crime.

We are particularly glad that this discussion is taking place less than four months after the historic Vienna Forum which took place in February this year, following the launch of the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT). The UAE has been a committed partner in this initiative from the outset, through the initial donation of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, towards the creation of the UN.GIFT. The UAE has contributed actively to this initiative and pledges continued support based on our belief in working together under a single banner to eliminate human trafficking. This philosophy is a driving force of our strategy.

In my capacity as Chairman of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, a federal committee mandated to address this issue in the UAE, I take this opportunity to outline my country's efforts to combat trafficking as well as the obstacles that we have encountered along the way.

Until a few years ago the UAE did not even imagine that trafficking was a problem we would ever face. But like many successful and rapidly growing societies, the UAE does suffer its share of this global phenomenon. There is no shame in admitting that this crime afflicts our society as we are committed to tackling human trafficking on every level.

The UAE's anti-human trafficking measures fully share in the UN's priorities of raising awareness, promoting international partnerships and collectively addressing this phenomenon. We intend to do more in partnership with the member states gathered here today, non-government organizations and like-minded individuals who are with us in this fight.

My delegation and I look forward to learning from the countries participating here today and sharing our experiences, initiating partnerships and capacity-

building processes as well as shoring up further commitment towards our common goals.

The UAE has demonstrated its commitment to the prevention and elimination of trafficking through the ratification of international human rights treaties, focusing on the rights of women and children in general, as well as trafficking. It has also taken a number of national legislative and policy measures to prevent and combat human trafficking. We have had our ups and downs in this fight yet our commitment is resolute.

Our counter-trafficking strategy has resulted in a comprehensive four-pillared action plan that includes: legislation; enforcement; victim support; as well as bilateral agreements and international partnerships. This strategy supports the UN's three-pronged approach of **Prevention, Protection and Prosecution**.

Firstly in the field of *legislation*, the UAE has passed a strong anti-human trafficking law, the first of its kind in the region. The Vienna forum reinforced the fact that legislation is a key component in any anti-trafficking measure. Parliamentarians and legislators must understand fully the dynamics of trafficking in order to effectively legislate against it. Our 16-article Federal Law 51 of November 2006 classifies human trafficking as an element of organised crime and covers all its manifestations – not just overt enslavement, but also sexual exploitation, child labour, and commerce in human organs. The law mandates the support and protection of victims and contains powerful and compelling penalties for those convicted, including fines of up to a quarter million US dollars and life imprisonment.

The committee is focusing on a results-oriented strategy based on the belief that each single case of trafficking is one case too many. Our Cabinet established the National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking in April 2007 with the aim of centralizing our efforts and creating a coordinating mechanism to combat this crime. The committee has a dual mandate – firstly, to coordinate between federal ministries and departments; and secondly, to promote the strict enforcement of the law and its provisions.

A year on since its establishment, the committee has recently published the UAE's first annual report on human trafficking. Data collection and analysis is a key part of our process – the more informed we are about the victims, the source countries, transit routes and methodologies of traffickers the more we can do to prevent them. We are aiming to create our own centralized database, in collaboration with law enforcement agencies, international organizations and

victim support centers in order to promote transparency and also effectively hone our counter-trafficking strategies based on real information rather than extrapolated figures and estimates.

Secondly, the UAE strategy focuses on *enforcement*. At least ¹⁵~~10~~ human trafficking cases were registered between November 2006 and the end of 2007. There have already been convictions in at least five cases, with the convicted receiving jail terms ranging from 3 to 10 years.

To ensure better implementation of the new measures, the federal government is continually training our law enforcement officers. A training series has been launched on the security risks related to human trafficking, human rights issues, prevention and control, as well as investigation methodology.

Companies that have been profiled as possible offenders, such as night clubs and tour operators, are being kept under strict police surveillance. The licenses of companies caught carrying out illegal activities are being cancelled. At least two night clubs involved in exploiting women were shut down during 2007.

The UAE is also concerned with prosecuting and preventing any exploitation of the labour workforce and has introduced a series of measures that are beginning to positively impact the country's labour climate. We are strengthening our mechanisms to ensure that enforcement of our laws constantly improves.

Thirdly, our strategy understands the importance of a comprehensive *victim support* structure. Legislation and enforcement is not enough and the UAE's holistic approach includes initiatives that determine how victims are treated by law enforcement officials, as well as improving the support programs available to them.

The government firmly believes that those who are exploited must be treated as victims, protected and supported through counseling and rehabilitation programs. At the same time, traffickers will be punished according to UAE law. The government has a healthy track record of providing assistance and protection to victims of sexual abuse. Police departments and non-government organisations provide shelter and support for these victims until they are able to acquire the right documentation. Many victims are then repatriated at the government's expense under the Crime Victim Assistance Program.

Aside from government-headed initiatives, charitable and social networks are also active in the UAE. Earlier this year, the government supported the UAE Red Crescent Authority initiative to establish shelters across the country for victims of human trafficking. These shelters will provide comprehensive social care programs that include medical treatment, psychological care and counselling, access to legal services, temporary accommodation, basic education and training, as well as safe repatriation with the help of a partner women's shelter in the victim's home country.

These efforts are in addition to other shelters such as the Dubai Women's and Children's Foundation, established in Dubai in July 2007, the Human Rights Care Department in Dubai as well as the Social Support Center in Abu Dhabi.

Fourthly, the UAE intends to pursue and build on *bilateral agreements and international cooperation*. Since trafficking begins at a victim's departure point from their home country, with a working network available at the point of arrival, the UAE has signed agreements with at least eight labour-exporting countries during the last two years to regulate the flow of workforce and prevent trafficking at its source.

In May 2007, the UAE ratified the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime which includes provisions for international cooperation in anti-human trafficking efforts. Furthermore, the Cabinet has approved the ratification of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.

The UAE's most high-profile effort to address human trafficking occurred a few years ago in response to recruitment practices taking place in the traditional sport of camel racing. Unfortunately, this sport became associated with child exploitation. Once aware, the UAE government immediately stepped in to regulate the sport and requested technical expertise from UNICEF to help protect and rehabilitate child victims. Between May 2005 and September 2006, all 1,077 child camel jockeys were successfully and safely returned to their homes in Asia and Africa. The repatriation and rehabilitation program included establishment of transit centers providing medical assistance to affected children, a family tracing system, social care, educational campaigns and establishment of community care committees.

In April 2007, the UAE and UNICEF opened a second phase of activity, which will continue until May 2009, to directly safeguard repatriated children from further exploitation in hazardous or exploitative labour. As part of this

mechanism, a joint team started visiting several countries last month to establish claims facilities to provide compensation to former jockeys, in addition to the previous assistance.

The UAE has therefore comprehensively and decisively put an end to this chapter in the history of this sport and continues to support and rehabilitate those who were victimized in the process.

Closing statement

Human trafficking is fostered by social and economic disparities and transcends national borders and can be viewed within a broad migration framework. While deterrence, legal punishment and international cooperation are important elements, addressing the underlying conditions which drive both supply and demand are also necessary.

Trafficking involves countries of origin, transit and final destination and no country or region acting alone can stop it. The UAE will continue to cooperate with all appropriate regional and international law enforcement officials to apprehend, prosecute and punish those violating the UAE's human trafficking law and those attempting to use the country to violate the anti-trafficking laws of other countries.

The UAE has achieved much in a short span of time, but realises that much more needs to be done. The government is committed to serving as an active member of the international community to tackle this phenomenon. We will continue to acknowledge our shortcomings and demonstrate resolve by vigorously improving our four-pillared action plan.

The UAE also intends to take a lead role in the creation and support of strong new international initiatives such as the one that has brought us together in New York.

Let me assure you that we will continue to welcome direct discussion and collaboration with other sovereign governments, public and private sector groups and international organisations – that will help stem the tide of human trafficking and strongly punishes those who would seek to profit from human suffering.

Thank you.