

5 March 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
at the International Conference on Trafficking in Women and Girls**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

I am delighted to participate in this International Conference on Trafficking in Women and Girls. I would like to thank the Ambassador of Belarus, H.E. Mr. Andrei Dapkiunas and the Ambassador of the Philippines, H.E. Mr. Lauro Baja Junior for inviting me, as well as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Vital Voices Global Partnership for organizing this important event.

This conference will add valuable support to the global eradication of all forms of trafficking in human beings. And, can make a helpful contribution to the informal thematic debate in the General Assembly on gender equality and the empowerment of women, which I will be convening tomorrow.

Human trafficking is a modern-day slave trade.

I cannot imagine a more terrible crime than the sale of women and children to be exploited and abused by others.

It violates fundamental human rights and exploits innocent people. Preventing this kind of activity should be one of the main objectives of the international community.

Trafficked children are the most vulnerable victims. Every child has the right to grow up in a protective environment, free from all forms of violence.

Distinguished Guests,

Human trafficking is a global problem, affecting millions of people mostly in impoverished countries, and generating billions of dollars worldwide for organized crime.

Combating this evil will promote stability, human security and dignity.

Where crime flourishes, governments and the rule of law are undermined and weakened.

However, during the past few years, international law for combating human trafficking has strengthened significantly.

In 2000, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime set out international standards for the prevention and combat of trafficking in persons for different forms of exploitation. This Protocol entered into force on 25 December 2003.

We must ensure the effective application of this legislation.

In 2006 the General Assembly adopted resolution 61/144 "Trafficking in women and girls", which calls upon all Governments to eliminate the demand for trafficked women and girls for all forms of exploitation.

It urges Governments to devise, enforce and strengthen effective gender and age-sensitive measures to combat and eliminate all forms of trafficking in women and girls.

Distinguished Guests,

Governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society are dedicating their efforts to counter human trafficking. Globalization has created the conditions where borders are easier to cross, allowing for a sharp increase in illicit cross-border activities. In countries with deep-rooted gender inequalities, the social cost of globalization has fallen disproportionately on women.

I commend the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for their Report and Toolkit which offer invaluable guidance and recommendations in response to this problem.

We are learning daily about new ways of preventing, investigating and controlling this crime as well as protecting and assisting its victims. We are gaining more momentum and new cooperation mechanisms are being developed.

I remain confident that through closer partnerships between governments, civil society and international organizations including the UN, we can protect the most vulnerable members of the international community, and bring the criminals to justice.

What is needed now is more of a bottom-up approach, building on closer cooperation and exchange of information between national and international authorities, which includes:

- Local-level empowerment and awareness raising,
- Better protection of migrants from labor exploitation,
- Direct participation of vulnerable groups in finding appropriate solutions,
- And better economic opportunities at home to offset risky migration practices.

Only then will we create an environment that is clearly hostile to human trafficking.

I am convinced that our shared compassion for the victims of this barbaric practice will inspire us to defeat this crime - I want to reiterate my willingness to cooperate closely with all Member States, non-governmental organizations and civil society towards this objective.

Thank you.