

13 May 2009

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the General Assembly Interactive Thematic Dialogue on Taking
Collection Action to End Human Trafficking**

Delivered by H.E. Mr. Maged A. Abdelaziz, Vice President of the Sixty-third Session of the General Assembly

I am very pleased to present the address of the President of the General Assembly, H.E. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann. The President d'Escoto is travelling to promote the June Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Development. He very much regrets being unable to join us here today . His address is as follows:

Your Excellency Nestor Arbito Chica, Minister of Justice and Human Rights of Ecuador,
Excellencies,
Mr. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon,
Mr. Under Secretary-General Antonio Maria Costa,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this Interactive Thematic Dialogue on taking collective action against the despicable crime of human trafficking. This is the second year in a row that the Assembly meets to debate this urgent issue. I am sorry that I can not be with you in person. This issue is close to my heart and I regard it as a priority for the 63rd session of the General Assembly. I would therefore like to share some thoughts with you.

Over the past two to three years we have witnessed a growing awareness and public outrage against this heinous crime. Yet I believe that We, as an international community, as the United Nations, and as individual Member States can and must do better.

For this reason I am particularly honoured and grateful to H.E. Nestor Arbito Chica of Ecuador, whose presence here also underscores our resolve to strengthen international efforts against this modern form of slavery. By bringing to bear both the criminal and human rights dimension of trafficking in persons, he places the victim at the crux of our collective endeavour to end this atrocity.

Similarly, I want to thank all today's panellists for bringing to this body their expertise, experience, knowledge, commitment and acquired acumen from working at the national, regional and international level to make collective action more meaningful, and to fill in the gaps that weaken the protection to which all victims and potential victims are entitled.

The focus of this debate is “taking collective action to end human trafficking”. I would like to focus on the two words: “collective”, and “action”.

Trafficking in persons is a crime that shames us all. While hidden in the shadows, it is also a crime that touches us all – as victims, witnesses, perpetrators, or the consumers of the goods and services of modern-day slaves. None of us – as compassionate human beings – can close our eyes to this tragedy, this crime that takes place all around us – including just a stone’s throw from UN headquarters in New York.

Human trafficking is a crime. It is a sin. And it is a violation of human rights.

Therefore we must all take responsibility – we must take collective action – to combat and END it. Those Member States that have not done so already should become Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol against Trafficking in Persons that supplements it.

While many countries have laws against human trafficking, the dark truth is that very few have good records for combating it, for enforcing these laws. This must change. Today’s dialogue will be successful if we identify the tools and strategies to enable us, as governments, as non-governmental organizations and as individuals, to press for legislation and the enforcement of that legislation.

Parliamentarians should adopt the laws, and enact national action plans to put the Protocol against Trafficking in Persons into practice.

Criminal justice systems must protect the victims, and bring traffickers to justice – including across borders.

Companies should clean up their supply chains and labour practices to ensure that they are not complicit in this crime. I urge companies to adopt the Athens Ethical Principles to restore confidence in the private sector, and ensure that profits are not made at the expense of our most vulnerable Sisters and Brothers, many of them children.

We have the tools at our disposal.

The media and celebrities can raise awareness and mobilize public support.

NGOs and civil society can help prevent the vulnerable from falling prey to traffickers, and rescue those who do. They can also be catalysts for change, and assist in gathering and disseminating information.

On paper, there is already a strong basis for collective approach. We have the legal tools, thanks to the anti-trafficking Protocol. We have a body to promote and review its implementation – the Conference of the Parties to the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. We have a Special Rapporteur.

But we need more action. The world is waking up to scope of the problem of human trafficking. We see it in movies, novels, and talk shows. This Assembly should not be behind the curve, but rather in the forefront leading the effort to end it once and for all.

There are plenty of anti-trafficking efforts being carried out around the world – locally, nationally, and regionally. But thus far they have been poorly coordinated.

That is why Member States decided last year to improve the coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons. You will recall that one proposal, part of a resolution adopted by the General Assembly last December, was to consider the advisability of a global plan of action against trafficking in persons. This proposal has already found support among the African Union, the Non-Aligned Movement, and in the Manama Declaration on “Human Trafficking at the Crossroads”. I urge you to provide a clear signal of support for this initiative as an outcome of today’s dialogue.

Furthermore, I urge you to come up with benchmarks on practical steps that can be taken to improve coordination and technical assistance. The Secretary-General’s background paper on improving the coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons provides us with plenty of food for thought.

In line with the Outcome document of the recent Durban Review Conference, I urge you to integrate a human rights perspective into the fight against human trafficking.

If we are to agree on a global plan of action, we need the “buy in” of all Member States, as well as a “One UN” approach. More than that, we need to involve all stakeholders who have an influence on ending this crime – the private sector, the media, women leaders, faith-based groups, anti-trafficking campaigners and civil society. An effective action plan must be global in reach and participation. In short, dealing with this global crime is a shared responsibility.

This debate should give us an honest evaluation of where we stand, a recognition of both progress and shortcomings, and clear directions for the way ahead.

The first interactive panel today will take stock of the current situation, particularly in relation to the criminal justice response. The recent Global Report on Trafficking in Persons issued by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (within the framework of UN.GIFT) provides us with useful background. We are grateful that Under Secretary-General Costa has joined us personally to provide the valuable experience of UNODC for the dialogue.

Panel Two will look at a growing number of good practices, including regional initiatives, instruments and cooperation. It will examine the constraints that Member States and others face on the ground, as well as why and how we might better deal with and overcome them.

The panellists will also offer to the Membership practical and doable steps we can undertake to be more effective.

Panel Three will look at the broader question of ensuring full and effective international coordination. Most importantly, it will examine the fault lines in our current system, the cracks which deny victims and potential victims, the protection to which they are justly entitled.

Dear Friends,

Trafficking in persons is a complex issue. We have therefore assembled a wide range of experts to enrich our understanding of: factors that deepen vulnerability; how the crime is carried out; what goes on in the minds of victims, traffickers and clients; ethical and moral dilemmas related to trafficking in persons; as well as how technology and data can be used to fight this crime.

I would like the discussion to conclude by identifying concrete ways of moving forward and undertaking collective action. More words and promises are not going to ‘free the slaves’.

Let us seize this opportunity to close gaps and join our efforts in order to have a united and global response to a crime that has no place in the 21st century. Together, the forces of good can defeat this evil, and ensure security, dignity, and justice for all humanity.

Dear friends, speakers, guests... you now have the floor.