

## **Summary of the interactive multi-stakeholder hearing of 13 July 2021 as part of the preparatory process for the high-level meeting on the appraisal of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons**

### **Introduction**

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 75/283 of 7 June 2021, the President of the General Assembly convened an informal interactive multi-stakeholder hearing as part of the preparatory process for the high-level meeting on the appraisal of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, attended by representatives of Member States, all observers of the General Assembly, national human rights institutions compliant with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles), non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, invited civil society organizations, academic institutions and the private sector, welcomes their contribution to the process.

The hearing was opened by the President of the General Assembly, followed by statements from the co-facilitators of the intergovernmental negotiations, the Permanent Representatives of the Republic of the Philippines and the Dominican Republic. Subsequently, introductory statements were heard from the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and a survivor of trafficking in persons.

The full-day hearing consisted of two panels featuring distinguished panelists from various stakeholder communities, as well as interventions from the floor by Member States, civil society organizations, the private sector, academia, and other participants. The detailed agenda is attached.

### **Key Messages and Recommendations for the 2021 Political Declaration**

#### **1. Further enshrine a victim-centered and survivor-based approach in responding to trafficking in persons**

Stakeholders underscored the importance of a victim- and survivor-centered approach to preventing and combating trafficking in persons. Participants called for the Political Declaration to affirm the human rights of victims and survivors and to consider the vulnerabilities of women and children to trafficking in persons. Another vulnerable group mentioned was children who are forcefully recruited into armed groups in conflict zones, and who must be recognized as victims of trafficking, with corresponding rights. The need to support victims' long-term reintegration and recovery was also reiterated. As part of that process, stakeholders highlighted the need to address the social stigma which can be associated with being a victim of trafficking in persons, so as to remove barriers to access public services and protection. Stakeholders noted that, as long as victims are discriminated against, the problems they face will not be given enough attention. In particular, participants noted the need to ensure access to helplines, legal aid, medical assistance, trauma care, and government-funded mental health support.

Stakeholders also focused on the growing misuse of technology to facilitate trafficking and online child sexual exploitation, noting how ensuring privacy in this process is crucial for protecting trafficking victims and preventing secondary abuse. Participants mentioned that privacy laws should be developed in line with child rights, particularly when they relate to technological developments.

Participants also encouraged Member States to consider how every law and policy measure affects victims of trafficking, including laws relating to migration. Stakeholders encouraged Member States to ensure permanent residence entitlements for victims of trafficking seeking asylum, to aid their reintegration, and to take steps to prevent re-trafficking.

The need to refrain from punishing victims of trafficking was also mentioned often, as an essential component of protecting victims of trafficking.

Stakeholders also stressed that responses to trafficking should crucially include and prioritize survivor-led efforts. Participants called for victims and survivors to be a part of national action plans to combat trafficking in persons, and to be at the core of the decision-making. Stakeholders also called for Governments to listen to women and girls, and to include them in the efforts to support to implement the "4 P's" approach ("Prevention," "Protection," "Prosecution," and "Partnership") of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish

Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, noting that victim protection is a critical component of ensuring effective prosecution of perpetrators of trafficking.

## **2. Address root causes and structural factors to prevent trafficking in persons**

A continuing theme throughout the hearing was the need to understand and address the root causes of trafficking in persons, with many speakers recognizing the intersections between crises and poverty. Participants noted that trafficking must be looked at as an ethical problem as well as a criminal justice issue. They noted that trafficking operates as part of an interconnected system and globalized economy which requires special attention to be given to aspects of gender, race, and child exploitation. Addressing trafficking by focusing on those already on the margins of society is critical as they are more likely to become victims of trafficking. Stakeholders called for attention to be given to the complex interplay of all factors in developing and implementing effective counter-trafficking responses.

Participants noted that, even though trafficking in persons takes different forms, including for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labor, or organ removal, all forms of trafficking and its linkages with crises, migration, labor policy, public health, and the protection of children, should be addressed comprehensively.

Stakeholders stressed that trafficking is not a gender-neutral problem and that we need to include women in leadership, power, and decision-making processes. They called for the 2021 Political Declaration to broaden the scope when assessing the root causes of trafficking, including through viewing the crime through the lens of structural socio-economic issues. Preventative measures mentioned were ensuring a living wage, education and skills, and preventing and mitigating the effects of climate change. Participants also called for counter-trafficking policies to recognize the vulnerabilities of children, noting that preventative educational measures should be available to children, including as part of sex education in schools. Some speakers also argued that “demand” for trafficking continues to be insufficiently addressed, noting the need to invest further in suppressing such demand.

## **3. Build and invest in an evidence base**

Many stakeholders shared sentiments about further developing and maintaining a human trafficking evidence base to assist in better understanding the key trends and root causes of trafficking. Panelists called for more centralized evidence-gathering and capacity to undertake related research. Further efforts to look at the threshold for exploitation and what forms it takes were encouraged. Speakers proposed that greater focus should be devoted to methodology, agenda, and end goals in evidence-gathering, and more precise definitions and metrics of what successful trafficking responses look like should be developed. Indicators of trafficking also need to be better researched and understood.

Participants also recommended that victims and survivors should be included in counter-trafficking research, as leaders and equal partners. They called for the evidence base to reflect the complexity of the human experience, noting that trafficking in persons is not one-dimensional. Stakeholders called for research to be increased in the areas of the world with the highest prevalence of human trafficking, and for investments to be made in gathering evidence on internet-based trafficking, and how traffickers are adapting to an online business model. Participants called for further research to look into the use of social media platforms to recruit victims, often with promises of job offers or other opportunities. Responding to trafficking in the context of rebuilding after the COVID-19 pandemic also requires new research, analysis, and funding.

## **4. Recognize emerging trends and crises**

Underlining the critical need to recognize emerging challenges and address particular vulnerabilities to trafficking, many participants stressed that specific measures should be taken to analyze and respond to how COVID-19 has affected human trafficking, including changes to traffickers' business model. Speakers recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges and vulnerabilities to trafficking, while resources and funding have decreased. Unemployment, poverty, and the health crises created by COVID-19 have left people without jobs in increasingly vulnerable situations to exploitation. An urgent, systematic, and predictable response, including preventive and protective measures, is required, to tackle trafficking in persons

in the context of COVID-19, including from the UN system. Participants stressed the need for civil society and Member States to work together to mitigate the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Stakeholders also stressed that the specific vulnerability of migrants and refugees to being trafficked also warrants greater investigation and attention. Speakers encouraged Member States to be aware of how national laws, especially those suppressing migration, can affect the prevention and identification of victims of trafficking. Examples mentioned were labor laws, border control measures, and access to asylum.

Speakers highlighted the potential of innovation, technology, research, and statistics in designing measures to respond to emerging challenges of trafficking in persons. Stakeholders called for a multi-faceted approach to addressing the prevention of trafficking in persons for the purposes of organ removal, and to tackle links with transnational organized crime.

Stakeholders also emphasized the need for holistic laws to be in place, which include prevention, prosecution, and protection of victims as part of comprehensive responses to trafficking. The exponential growth of sexual violence and child sexual abuse online needs more focus and funding. Speakers strongly emphasized that Member States must create anti-child sexual abuse material laws. Additionally, Member States should partner with internet providers to detect the use of child sexual abuse material. Moreover, speakers highlighted the correlation between the low age of sexual consent sexual exploitation of children. Additionally, speakers called for more regulation and proper review of international adoption processes to ensure that women are not pressured to involuntarily give up their children for adoption. The importance of adequate screening to detect illicit adoption of children for sexual exploitation, forced labor, or organ removal was also highlighted.

Lastly, participants stressed the utmost need to ensure Member States fully implement the Global Plan of Action, in order to fill the gaps between the commitments made and actions taken.

## **5. Enhance coordination, cooperation, and partnership**

Stakeholders stressed the importance of collaboration and inclusion of all stakeholders in order to combat trafficking. Participants stated that building partnerships among governments, the UN system, civil society, the private sector, NGOs, as well as victims and survivors is crucial to prevent and combat trafficking. Such partnerships can be energized through the engagement of media, educators, research institutes, NGOs, and businesses. Participants drew attention to the significance of supporting women-led businesses, including to reduce the number of women who become sex workers. Moreover, stakeholders mentioned that Member States should provide women in the sex industry with exit strategies so that they are aware of options available to them should they find themselves in a difficult financial situation. Additionally, as part of efforts to fight trafficking for the purposes of forced labor, participants emphasized the need to promote fair trade and invited consumers to be more conscious of the need to combat trafficking in supply chains.

Speakers recommended that medical professionals and criminal justice professionals are included in the fight against trafficking for the purposes of organ removal. Corruption needs to be addressed through relevant policies, and medical personnel must be more alert to incidents of illicit organ removal by fellow medical staff. Building trust between civil society, victims, and Member States is essential and civil society, especially women-led and women-focused organizations, must be included as part of every process designed to respond to trafficking. Furthermore, the private sector must be involved in countering human trafficking for forced labor, including because the private sector sets labor standards and practices. Participants particularly recognized the importance of financial sector action in suppressing trafficking, calling for new tools to be developed to detect and disrupt the trafficking networks. Speakers also encouraged comprehensive training of law enforcement personnel to detect human trafficking at early stages.

Speakers encouraged Member States to improve their relationships with tech companies and invest more funds in innovation to further develop technologies used for detecting human trafficking. Additionally, the great potential for using technology, research, and information-sharing in designing measures to prevent trafficking was also emphasized. There was a renewed call for more resources and funding to combat trafficking in persons, especially given its scale and magnitude. Speakers also advised of the importance of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, as an effective instrument for supporting victims of trafficking, and called for enhanced contributions to the Fund to allow its crucial work to continue.

Speakers also committed to continuing to engage in the 2021 appraisal of the Global Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons process and looked forward to the High-Level Plenary Meeting to Review the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, to be held on 22-23 November 2021.

**INFORMAL INTERACTIVE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER HEARING IN SUPPORT OF THE PREPARATORY PROCESS TOWARDS THE HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING TO REVIEW THE GLOBAL PLAN OF ACTION TO COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS**

**Virtual, New York, Tuesday 13 July 2021, 10:00 – 12:00 and 15:00 – 17:00 (EDT)**

**Final Agenda**

TIME	MORNING MEETING
10.00 – 10:25	<p><b>High-Level Opening of the Informal Interactive Multi-stakeholder Hearing</b></p> <p>Moderator: <b>H.E. Ms. Amal Mudallali</b>, Vice-President of the General Assembly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>H.E. Mr. Volkan Bozkir</b>, President of the 75<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly</li> <li>• <b>H.E. Mr. Enrique A. Manalo</b>, Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Philippines to the United Nations, New York</li> <li>• <b>H.E. Mr. José Alfonso Blanco Conde</b>, Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations, New York</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Filippo Grandi</b>, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Ghada Waly</b>, Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Itohan Okundaye</b>, Survivor of trafficking for sexual exploitation, Nigeria</li> </ul>
10.25-12:00	<p><b>Panel 1: The Global Plan of Action and enduring trafficking issues and gaps</b></p> <p>Moderator: <b>Mr. Yitna Getachew</b>, Head, Migrant Protection and Assistance Division, International Organization for Migration (IOM)</p> <p><i>Panellists:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ms. Marijana Savic</b>, Founder and Director of ATINA, NGO from Serbia (<i>speaking on trafficking of women and children for the purposes of sexual exploitation</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Carolina Rudnick Vizcarra</b>, Founder and Director of Libera Foundation, NGO from Chile (<i>speaking on trafficking for the purposes of forced labour</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Ms. Habiba Osman</b>, Executive Secretary of the Malawi Human Rights Commission (<i>speaking on ending the culture of impunity of traffickers</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Marika McAdam</b>, International Legal and Policy Advisor specialized in counter-human trafficking and migrant smuggling (<i>speaking on building the evidence base on trafficking in persons</i>)</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Pre-registered interventions and Q&amp;A from the floor</u></b></p> <p>The time limit for each intervention from the floor is 3 minutes.</p>
	<b>AFTERNOON MEETING</b>

15:00 – 16:50	<p><b>Panel 2: The Global Plan of Action and emerging issues</b></p> <p>Moderator: <b>Ms. Delphine Schantz</b>, Representative, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) New York Liaison Office</p> <p><i>Panellists:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Prof. Siobhán Mullally</b>, Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons (<i>speaking on non-punishment of victims of trafficking</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Francis Bermido</b>, President, People’s Recovery and Development Assistance (PREDA), NGO from the Philippines (<i>speaking on trafficking in persons in the context of COVID-19</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Sebastian Arevalo</b>, Director, Pasos Libres, NGO from Colombia (<i>speaking on the misuse of information and communication technologies to facilitate trafficking</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Debra Budiani</b>, Chief Executive Director and founder, Coalition for Organ-Failure Solutions (COFS) (<i>speaking on trafficking in persons for the purposes of organ removal</i>)</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Pre-registered interventions and Q&amp;A from the floor</u></b></p> <p>The time limit for each intervention from the floor is 3 minutes.</p>
16:50 – 17:00	<p><b>Closing Session</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mr. Farrukh Khan</b>, Chief of Cabinet, Office of the President of the General Assembly</li> <li>• <b>Dame Julie Okah-Donli</b>, Board Chair, UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Human Trafficking</li> </ul>