

**High-level Meeting on the Appraisal of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking  
in Persons**

**H.E. Miroslav Lajcak, President of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly**

*(check against delivery)*

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Honourable Ministers,

His Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres

Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of UNODC,

Ms. Mira Sorvino, UNODC Goodwill Ambassador for the global fight against human trafficking,

Ms. Grizelda Grootboom, Civil society representative and victim of human trafficking

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome and thank you all for your presence and engagement.

This weekend I was deeply moved by my conversation with Shireen Ibrahim - a Yazidi woman and advocate who survived human trafficking at the hands of terrorists. Her dignity, human rights and her person were violated. Her story shows the horrors and complexity of this scourge. But most importantly, it is a somber reminder that we are talking about people here.

We are not having this meeting to cross it off our checklist. We are here to track the progress we have made so far. And to see how much further we have to go to eliminate human trafficking forever.

Today we recommit ourselves to the fight against all forms of human trafficking. We pledge, once again, our respect for the human rights and dignity of our people. The declaration to be adopted today shows our political will to end human trafficking. But this will must be manifested in actions. Only then will it be meaningful for the people affected.

I would like to highlight three main points:

First, that a focus on people in this context means a victim and survivor centered approach. It also means upholding the human rights and dignity of people like Shireen Ibrahim, Grizelda Grootboom and many others. I pause to pay special tribute to the victims and survivors, some of whom are with us here today. Their presence reminds us of the reason we are here – so that people can live freely and peacefully – free from the threat of human trafficking. And for those victims and survivors who do not have a platform, we have a duty to be their voice. This is why the UN is here.

Second, we must strengthen our prevention efforts. Today's global peace and security challenges amplify the risk of human trafficking. We need to address the root causes.

Shireen Ibrahim's story underscores what we already know: Preventing conflict helps to prevent human trafficking. The chasm between peace and war has many perils - human trafficking is one of them. Conflicts and humanitarian disasters force millions to flee their homes. With human trafficking and migration following similar geographical patterns, some get caught at the ever-shifting intersection of the two.

Further, we are confronted by terrorists and criminals who have no regard for human suffering. They thrive on the instability created by conflicts and humanitarian crises. A lack of strong institutions and absence of rule of law allows human trafficking to continue with impunity. We also know that these groups derive financing from this criminal enterprise.

These are but a few dimensions of human trafficking. The full picture is complex and many-sided. But what is common across the whole spectrum is that - prevention is better than cure. Poverty, human rights violations, unemployment, lack of accountability and other factors fan the flames of human trafficking. We must starve traffickers of benefits while addressing both the "demand" and "supply" side of the problem. For this, we need all hands on deck – for what we in the UN call, "a multi-stakeholder approach".

Third, those most at risk among us need our special attention. Women, children, internally displaced persons and refugees are among the most vulnerable to human trafficking. 79% of all detected victims are women and children. Human trafficking's focus on women and children threatens to unravel the fabric of our society. It rolls back the progress we have made. Therefore, we must put the spotlight on the most vulnerable to trafficking.

Excellencies,

Lastly, and importantly, we have many plans and instruments. We must take further concerted action to achieve a world free of human trafficking. Our plans include:

1. The Global Plan of Action;
2. The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Traffickers in Persons, especially Women and Children;
3. The Sustainable Development Goals - Across Goals 5, 8 and 16, we are called upon to end human trafficking, with particular emphasis on women, children and decent work; and
4. The New York Declaration adopted at the 2016 UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants.

Another important instrument is the political declaration to be adopted today. I thank the Permanent Representatives of Qatar and Belgium for their invaluable efforts that led us to this consensual outcome.

I urge continued contribution to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for victims of Human Trafficking. We need to support victims to reclaim their lives. This will mean financial, psycho-social and other forms of support. Resources must match the scale of the challenges we face in fighting human trafficking.

Excellencies,

Human trafficking knows no borders. It affects people in the north and south and has many faces.

We have made progress but we have much further to go. Our goal is zero trafficking. Let us commit to stronger cooperation for decisive global action. Let us leave the abhorrent trade in human beings in the past forever!