

Mr President, Excellences, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen, Sweden aligns itself with the statement by the European Union and the statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic countries.

Combating brutal human rights violations through trafficking in persons must be a priority for us all. It is our common responsibility. Sweden remains strongly committed to eradicating all forms of trafficking in persons. We would therefore like to congratulate the United Kingdom for organising this ministerial open debate.

Today's debate is important for many reasons. Firstly, we need to ensure this issue remains on the global agenda. Today's discussion builds on the momentum created under the Spanish Presidency of the Council. Secondly, we need to move forward with actions in line with Resolution 2331 (2016). Finally, trafficking in persons is a transnational threat, which requires a transnational response. The UN provides a unique forum for achieving this goal.

Mr President,

Human trafficking and various forms of slavery are flourishing. This is due to ongoing conflicts and the massive displacement of civilian populations, such as the situation in the Lake Chad Basin region, which the Council visited two weeks ago. It flourishes because there are those ready to cruelly exploit persons in vulnerable situations.

The most effective way to end human trafficking is to address its root causes. The root cause is demand: if men did not buy sexual services there would be no trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Preventing conflict and displacement before they occur and investing in equitable sustainable development for all are important measures in combating human trafficking. Existing international obligations relating to human trafficking and forced labour must also be fully implemented.

This Council has an important role to play in prevention, including through the Sustaining Peace agenda. In addition, peace operations mandated by this Council must see the role that organized criminal groups, as well as terrorist groups, play in perpetuating the unstable situations and conflicts that lead to human trafficking, and in human trafficking itself.

Working on the ground to create accountable and effective security sector institutions can enhance the capacity of Member States to address these groups.

Mr President,

As the Secretary-General has previously reported, there is a clear nexus between conflict and post-conflict-related sexual violence and human trafficking such as sexual slavery, forced labour, organ removal, the list is long. I will focus on sexual exploitation – predominantly targeting women, and girls and boys.

The effects of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation are different from the harm caused by trafficking for other forms of exploitation. Their seriousness is related to the specific ways in which the bodies of trafficked women and girls are abused.

Recognising that human trafficking has a clear gender dimension is therefore essential: all actions against trafficking should have a gender-specific approach.

Sweden wants to stress the importance of not creating legal markets for human traffickers. There is an ongoing discussion, within the UN, and elsewhere, about whether or not prostitution should be viewed as a profession; – the term sex worker is often used in these discussions. Swedish policy on this issue is clear. Prostitution can never be regarded as a job; prostitution is always exploitation. Sweden urges more countries to consider legislation that targets the person who buys sex and offers support to the person being exploited – thereby shifting the criminal focus and guilt from the person being exploited, to the exploiter.

Knowledge about one's own rights, including about sexual and reproductive health and rights, is crucial.

Another essential element is accountability in conflict and post-conflict environments. Sweden strongly supports the implementation of the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse.

As Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict we would also like to stress the particularly vulnerable situation of children in this regard and also highlight forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflicts as one of the worst forms of child labour. Target 8.7 of the SDG's asks us to eliminate this and we need to keep a strong focus on achieving this goal. We also need to focus on goal 5 regarding gender equality and other relevant goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda.

Sweden is proud to be a pathfinder country of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. This is a crucial initiative and Sweden would like to urge more countries to join this partnership.

Finally, Mr President, we need to enable women and girls to decide over their own bodies, lives and futures in all contexts. We need to engage more women in both peace building activities and actions against trafficking. By implementing the women, peace and security agenda we can ensure that women's voices, experiences and solutions are brought to the table. Gender equality is about human rights.

Thank you.