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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 May 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. RECOGNIZE THE GLOBAL PRESENCE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION TO HINDER ITS GROWTH

1. INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking, in all its forms, is an issue that plagues every country to some degree or another. The United Nations (U.N.) defines human trafficking as:

[T]he recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation[1].

Further, human trafficking can be either international or intranational in nature[2]. Through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), we have highlighted the continued problem of human trafficking in 14 countries.

2. BACKGROUND

In 1997, the United States estimated that there were 700,000 human trafficking victims worldwide[3]. In response to the continued severe problem that human trafficking posed across the globe, the U.N. passed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (also known as the Palermo Protocol) in November of 2000, which supplemented the U.N. Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Between 2003—when the Palermo Protocol went into effect—and 2008, the number of countries that had passed legislation criminalising human trafficking increased from 52 to 124[4].

Then, recognising that human trafficking had continued to grow worldwide, in 2010 the U.N. adopted a global plan of action to combat human trafficking[5]. However, according to sources used by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), approximately 25 million people were trafficked for forced labor and sexual exploitation in 2016 worldwide,[6] and according to another non-governmental organisation (NGO), there are over 40 million current victims of human trafficking worldwide[7].

Clearly, there is much work to be done to combat the increasingly problematic issues of modern-day slavery.

3. VIOLATIONS

Human traffickers target the most vulnerable and abused individuals with false promises of well-paying jobs. In fact, in the United States it estimated that approximately 90% of sex-trafficking victims have suffered abuse long before being trafficked[8]. According to an FBI victims specialist “victimization is all about vulnerability”, traffickers know this and use this to their advantage to lure in their victims[9]. When the victims agree to go with the traffickers, the traffickers then continue a pattern of abuse and excerpt control over every aspect of the victim’s life. The victims are forced to live in extremely poor conditions while making the bare minimum, if any at all, while their captors take the rest.

In Samoa, a man was found guilty of 10 counts of human trafficking and 13 counts in dealing in slaves in March of 2020[10]. The court found that he had trafficked 13 individuals, the youngest of which was 12, from Samoa to New Zealand over a 25-year period[11]. According to reports he promised these individuals paid horticulture work for schooling in Hawkes Bay. However, after arriving in New Zealand these victims found

themselves working long hours in the fields for no pay. The judge chastised the man, stating that “[t]he victims were told they could earn significant income by Samoan standards, which they would be able to send back to their families. Once in New Zealand, these Samoan nationals were exploited by you for your own financial gain”[12].

In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (St. Vincent), despite all their protocols, laws, and protections in place, as well as the creation of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Unit (ANTIPU), human trafficking remains a serious issue. Women, men and even children (both domestic and foreign) are trafficked for forced labour in night clubs, farms, mines, and factories[13]. According to a report shared by the St. Vincent Police Force, while incidents of human trafficking have been investigated, the government has not prosecuted a case since 2015, and – even more troubling – it has never successfully convicted a human trafficker[14].

In Suriname, women and girls are sexually exploited in the country’s interior mining camps and forced to work in brothels, bars, and strip clubs[15]. It has proven to be difficult for authorities to properly investigate cases of human trafficking in these mining camps as much of the interior is remote, “where outsiders may only reach the communities via airplane.”[16]. This makes it easier for traffickers to operate with impunity and creates difficulties in understanding the full scope of human trafficking.

In Thailand, the majority victims are Thai nationals who are used for sexual exploitation domestically[17]. However, victims from neighboring countries such as Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, also comprise a high number of the individuals trafficked into Thailand each year[18]. According to the Global Slavery Index, there are an estimated 610,000 human trafficking in Thailand today[19]. In 2019 alone, Thailand rescued a record high of 1,807 victims of human trafficking – up from 622 in 2018[20].

Children are also targeted by human traffickers in Thailand for use in prostitution, as well as for online pornography. According to estimates, there are approximately 30,000 to 40,000 children working as prostitutes in Thailand[21]. The COVID-19 pandemic has only further contributed to the exploitation of children and has led to a massive increase in online sexual abuse of children in 2020[22]. In 2020 the Internet Crimes Against Children (TICAC) taskforce was able to rescue more than 100 children from sexual abuse, recover over 150,000 files of child sexual material, and opened 53 cases[23].

These are just few examples of the many cases of human trafficking that occur on a daily basis all around the world.

4. Request

Due to the commonly international nature of human trafficking, it is sometimes difficult for an individual government to investigate reports of trafficking and to punish traffickers. The U.N. has already recognized this fact, and thus requires Member States to cooperate with each other to investigate and prosecute trafficking[24]. However, from a practicality standpoint, it can still be difficult to investigate such crimes, especially across borders. Therefore, it would be valuable to use the resources and assistance that many NGOs, especially faith-based groups, provide addressing this issue.

Additionally, properly combatting human trafficking requires comprehensive legislation containing sufficient penalties for human traffickers as well as providing rehabilitation services and aid for the victims. However, these laws are useless if proper resources and training are not afforded to the appropriate authorities. Therefore, in order to combat trafficking, countries must also commit resources and proper training to authorities so that they can identify cases of human trafficking and put an end to this atrocity.

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