

UNODC Executive Director's Remarks
Launch of the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022

Madam Chair,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this special event of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, to launch UNODC's Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022.

This edition of the GLOTIP report comes at a time when our planet is grappling with multiple crises and their consequences.

From conflicts, instability and economic strife to climate change to the aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergencies we face have dominated headlines and demanded priority.

We face a very real danger that the trafficking and exploitation of human beings will thrive in the shadows, while the world is distracted, even as these same crises aggravate risks of trafficking and affect trends and responses.

The 2022 GLOTIP report, which covers trafficking cases detected in 141 countries between 2017 and 2021, reveals a shifting landscape and an urgent need for collective action.

For the first time in the 20 years that UNODC has collected data on trafficking in persons, we have found a decrease in the number of victims detected globally.

The number of victims detected in 2020 declined by eleven per cent compared to 2019, including a twenty per cent decrease in cross-border victims.

The number of convicted human traffickers has also declined, with a twenty-seven per cent reduction in convictions globally in 2020. In some regions, the drop-off was above fifty per cent.

These numbers tell a complex story.

It is likely true that movement restrictions connected to the pandemic restricted traffickers in many ways, closing down certain avenues for exploitation.

But the bigger picture of a world in turmoil suggests that trafficking risks went up rather than down.

People have been left poorer, less protected and more desperate, and therefore more likely to be targeted by traffickers.

Meanwhile, resources have been severely strained, undermining the capacities of Member States to detect trafficking, assist victims, and prosecute traffickers.

In fact, the drop in victims detected was most prominent in low and middle-income countries, particularly in Central and South America, as well as in Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia, and the Pacific.

Member States in these regions attributed the lower victim detection to the fact that law enforcement resources were absorbed by the pandemic response, leaving less resources available to address trafficking in persons.

Some forms of trafficking may have also been pushed deeper underground.

Sexual exploitation, for example, has traditionally taken place in public venues, but could have shifted to more private locations such as apartments and hotels due to COVID-related closures, leaving it more difficult to detect.

The numbers tell a story of victims suffering in the dark, unseen.

They tell a story of human traffickers likely going unpunished, capitalizing on catastrophe to prey on people.

And as we continue to live through global crises, many people are left more exposed than ever.

The conflict in Ukraine has created a refugee emergency and left millions displaced.

Recent history suggests that they are at extremely high risk of being targeted by traffickers: when conflict broke out in Ukraine in 2014, the

number of Ukrainian victims of human trafficking detected in Western Europe increased drastically, rising fourfold by 2016.

Other ongoing conflicts are resulting in similar alarming risks, most notably in Africa and the Middle East, where most conflicts are happening today. Data in the report indicates that the majority of conflict-related victims originate in, and are trafficked to, countries in those regions.

As climate change continues to ravage our planet, it also continues to amplify trafficking risks.

In 2021, 23.7 million people were internally displaced by weather-induced natural disasters, while others crossed borders to escape climate-induced poverty, leaving many at the mercy of human traffickers.

Sadly, but not surprisingly, the most vulnerable bear the worst of the suffering.

Female victims of trafficking, who continued to account for the larger number of victims in 2020, are three times more likely to suffer violent forms of trafficking, while children are almost twice as likely as adults.

At the same time, the report reveals that more and more men and boys are being detected as victims, increasingly for forced criminality and mixed forms of exploitation.

The report also reveals a tragic fact about victims of trafficking: most of the victims identified escape exploitation and come forward on their own. They are not found and saved by law enforcement.

We need to do better.

Detection is crucial. We cannot help victims if we cannot see them.

Countries need to develop stronger national frameworks for the identification and protection of victims of trafficking, especially during states of emergency when detection is more difficult, and especially in low and middle-income countries where resources may be lacking.

This includes stronger vigilance against exploitation in out of sight locations as well as online, working closely with the private sector.

And a more proactive approach is sorely needed in identifying and helping victims and in investigating cases.

We need to improve awareness and raise visibility of growing risks and shifting trends, and to engage communities, civil society, and all relevant stakeholders in finding and helping those in need, and in catching those responsible.

Every victim deserves support, regardless of who they are, what they may have been forced to do, and whether they choose to participate in criminal proceedings.

Protection and assistance must be tailored to the victim's profile and form of exploitation.

In parallel, it is necessary to ensure that the most vulnerable segments of society have access to income and basic services, and that those fleeing conflict and strife are afforded humanitarian assistance and protection.

We also need to strengthen the capacity of Member States to prosecute cases of trafficking both online and offline, and to ensure that enough resources are available for this purpose, to end impunity for traffickers.

Organized criminal groups require particular attention, as they exploit more victims, with more violence, for longer periods of time.

The UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol on Trafficking in Persons remain crucial, and should be implemented more widely and effectively.

UNODC is supporting countries in implementing these instruments and combatting human trafficking, including through technical and legislative assistance.

Building on the findings of this report, our Office will strive to assist countries to restore pre-COVID capacities and improve upon them.

We will also work with relevant partners across the UN on stronger common approaches to emerging priorities, including through the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Trafficking in Persons.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Around the globe, we face momentous challenges.

But we cannot let the cacophony of crisis drown out the voices of those who are being exploited for profit.

It is my hope that the GLOTIP 2022 report will shed light on the plight of victims of trafficking, and will help Member States understand the complexity of the issue, improve responses, and strengthen prevention.

UNODC stands ready to support you, to help those who need us and to end human trafficking.

Thank you.