

## **Message by the UNODC Executive Director for the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons 2022**

Connecting with each other online and over messaging platforms is part of daily life for billions of people around the world, especially youth.

The Internet has become a vital lifeline as the COVID-19 pandemic has restricted travel and kept us apart. But the advantages and potential of digital technologies to bring us together and better our lives are also being increasingly exploited by criminals.

Trafficking in persons is a crime that exploits vulnerability, desperation, and trust. Traffickers take advantage of social media and other online platforms to exploit victims.

The borderless nature of information and communications technologies enables traffickers to expand their reach and profits with even greater impunity.

More than 60 per cent of detected human trafficking victims over the last 15 years have been women and girls, most of them trafficked for sexual exploitation.

Countless more people are in danger of being exploited today, as conflicts and crises increase misery, and criminals target the desperate with false promises of opportunities, jobs, and a better life.

To protect people, we need to protect digital spaces from criminal abuse. To do so, we must support countries to harness technologies for good.

Partnerships with tech companies and the private sector can keep traffickers from preying on the vulnerable and stop the circulation of online content that amplifies the suffering of trafficking victims.

We can assist law enforcement authorities to use, with technical support and appropriate safeguards, artificial intelligence, data mining and other tools to detect and investigate trafficking networks.

We can do more to raise awareness and keep social spaces online safe through cooperation with civil society and all stakeholders.

On this World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, let us commit to preventing online exploitation and promoting the power of tech to better protect children, women and men, and support victims.