



Thank you Chair, Distinguished Participants and Fellows,

My name is Beatriz Costa. I have a degree in Political Science and International Relations, and I'm currently studying for a master's degree in Strategy. I am affiliated with the InterAgency Institute, which is a digital think tank with the aim of working for human security in the dimension of local development and global security through research, investigation, debate and knowledge sharing.

My intervention addresses the trafficking in human beings, with a special focus on cyberspace as a new form of criminal machine and the exponential growth of the phenomenon. The expansion of crime associated with cyberspace reveals the incorporation of new audiences. Before, the phenomenon was linked to a universe of the world's population that was more socially, geographically and economically vulnerable. Today, optimized by cyberspace, human trafficking is not only multidimensional, but also affects any human being regardless of their color, sex, religion, nationality or social class.

In addition, due to an approach strictly focused on national security and punishing traffickers, most states do not contribute to defending the human rights of trafficking victims. It is a logic of subordinating the interests of the victim to the pursuit of the criminal through border control, deportation, restrictive policies or other practices that underpin the conception of human trafficking as a migratory problem. This practice not only harms victims - who suffer restrictions on their rights to participate in investigations by collaborating with national authorities under threat of intimidating threats - but also compromises civil society approaches, particularly non-governmental organizations (NGOs), triggering tensions with actors with whom they should be working in cooperation. Furthermore, the strong institutional, political and economic dependence of NGOs, combined with the limited technical experience of their members, implies the structural civil society to develop activities that are antagonistic to the institutional procedure, defending discourses based on a logic of national security and persecution, to the detriment of the demand for protection of the rights and proper reception of victims of human trafficking.

Although the internet is a relatively new criminal engineering tool, according to a UN study, more than 80% of sex trafficking cases in 2020 in developed countries involved some kind of online contact. Nevertheless, communities marked by inequalities and conflicts of various kinds are naturally more exposed and vulnerable to the global demands of human exploitation. I believe that although there have been significant advances in legislation on human trafficking in most countries, these measures fall far short of the need to promote discussion on the issue, especially at the level of civil society bodies as well as government powers focused on national security. Portugal, the case study I analyzed, is an example of the inoperability of this flawed structure in inter-agency cooperation, since between 2007 and 2015, 71% of criminal cases related to human trafficking were dismissed.

In addition to the issues considered above, the proliferation of the scourge is optimized, especially in certain regions of the world, due to the inability of the authorities to keep up with technological development, which is largely precarious and insufficient compared to the capacity of internationally developed and organized criminal networks to expand human trafficking globally. In view of this, inter-agency action is essential to promote coordination between the state and NGOs in order to complement each other in protecting victims rights and in identifying, prosecuting and imprisoning criminals.

Recommendations:

I. In order to prevent and mitigate the growth of human trafficking at national and international level, we recommend making it central to public debate by maximizing interagency efforts to combat it globally. In addition, we suggest inserting the issue of human trafficking as a central theme in school programs so that children and young people have the proper capacity to understand social issues linked mainly to addressing human rights and risks in cyberspace. The growing supply of technological materials in learning structures cannot go unaccompanied by raising awareness and sensitization of the risk phenomena involved in these devices. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to join forces to create research centers, scholarships, congresses and exchanges whose main purpose is to learn about the realities of different countries and seek to apply sophisticated combat methods to the territories of primitive mechanisms.

II. Providing financial aid to non-governmental organizations in order to mitigate their financial, economic and political dependence on the states in which they operate, so that their activities can be carried out with the autonomy needed to achieve their objectives. Furthermore, autonomy would open up space for new approaches, different from the one referred to by the state of subordinating the rights of trafficked victims to the incriminating demands of traffickers.

III. Strengthen an information and development system in cyberspace through cooperation between AI (Artificial Intelligence) specialists for research into tracking techniques, empirical scientific experiments on criminal platforms, as well as the transfer of capacities and technologies from countries with more developed computer and tracking systems to countries that lack such ingenuity.

Most developing countries don't have the financial, educational and technological structure to create effective mechanisms in the face of obscure internet platforms such as the Dark Web, shrouded in a completely secretive system of message coding and trade with highly encrypted digital currencies. There is an urgent need to build a system of inter-agency cooperation (from local to global and vice versa), in which highly specialized professionals would help governmental and non-governmental authorities to start acting more efficiently than organized crime networks.

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