

Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized
Crime (UNTOC) 12 – 16 October 2020

Statement under Agenda Item 1(f) - General discussion

Mr Chair,

Malta aligns itself with the statement made by Germany on behalf of the European Union. I would, however, like to highlight these important points in my national capacity. We gather here today for the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime under COVID-19 restrictions. While we may be annoyed by these limitations – the lockdowns, travel restrictions, and other measures put in place to contain the spread of the pandemic have proven to be a further blow to law enforcement resources, leading to increased risk to the life of trafficked persons, especially to women and children. All the while organized crime networks continue to increase their profit.

Mr Chair,

20 years on from the Palermo Convention - a milestone in our battle against organised crime, it is all the more imperative that in addressing this situation, we make sure that partnerships between law enforcement agencies and local communities, in particular grassroots organisations, are strengthened, in order to identify and provide preliminary information on the victims or perpetrators, as well as educate and create awareness within the community. Furthermore, investigative and prosecution legislations need to be harmonised, in order to be sympathetic to the vulnerabilities of the victims and ensure their protection.

At the international level, international institutions are important tools in providing technical assistance and capacity-building measures to ensure that States have the required mechanisms to confront human trafficking.

In creating more awareness about this issue, Malta was one of over seventy countries to have endorsed the Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, launched by leaders at the UN General Assembly in 2017. Moreover, last year Malta signed the instruments of ratification for the 2014 Protocol to the 1930 Forced Labour Convention, which was presented to the International Labour Organisation. This year, Malta officially

joined the UNODC Blue Heart Campaign, through which we contributed with a significant amount to the Victim Trust Fund.

Mr Chair,

The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted migrant smuggling networks in the Mediterranean, which have remained highly active, despite the movement restrictions put in place. Several observers have noted an increase in the number of boats attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea since the onset of the pandemic, with a significant increase in the number of arrivals in Europe along the Central Mediterranean route in particular. During the first months of this year, Malta experienced an almost 400% increase in arrivals when compared to the previous year.

Participants in the annual Working Group on the Smuggling of Migrants, established by the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, reported that criminal smuggling networks have adapted to changes in world dynamics brought about by the pandemic. These illegal businesses are thriving due to an increase in demand for such services, and are expected to grow further as the negative impact of the pandemic on livelihoods worldwide continues to set in. It is unfortunate that smugglers often continue to face minimal risk of detection and punishment for their crimes.

Mr Chair,

As countries closed or are closing their borders in an attempt to curb the spread of the virus, migrants, including women and children, are often left to fend on their own in transit countries. The intensification of border patrols together with increased restrictions at entry points, has led smugglers to resort to more dangerous sea routes. As a consequence, migrants can find themselves exposed to exploitation, abuse, and violence to more significant degrees.

In this respect, Malta also reiterates the importance of international cooperation to combat and prevent human smuggling. Multilateral collaboration and assistance with organisations such as the OSCE, especially during the current challenging times where resources are stretched - is crucial. In this regard, Malta organised a regional workshop for both the government and law enforcement agencies on 9-10 December 2019 in Valletta. The workshop was organized by the Strategic Police Matters Unit of the OSCE Transnational Threats Department (SPMU), in joint co-operation with the Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section of the Organized

Crime and Illicit Trafficking Branch of the UNODC and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Malta reiterates the importance of combatting both human trafficking and migrant smuggling, through a multi-disciplinary approach. We must also be aware of the increasing co-option of technology by organised criminal networks in the perpetration of their crimes. Innovations in Fintech and communications are also being used by these networks to finance terrorist groups and attack institutions, often with state-level capabilities. A comprehensive approach to cybercrime, including implementing better IT security, equipping law enforcement with counter-cybercrime capabilities, and educating potential targets are of the utmost importance if we hope to stay ahead of those willing to use technology for malicious activities.

In conclusion, Mr Chair, we look forward to the review of the implementation of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children, and the Protocol against Smuggling of Migrants by land, sea, and air, later on during this Conference. I also reaffirm my country's commitment to uphold the effective implementation of international obligations to combat these atrocious crimes, and express our willingness to continue working within multilateral institutions, as well as with civil society actors, on this front.

Thank you Mr Chair.