

Delegation of the Republic of Armenia
Statement under Agenda Item 2
at the UNTOC Working Group on Trafficking in Persons
Vienna, 08-09 July 2024

Thank you Mr. Chair.

At the outset, I would like to thank Co-Chairs and the Secretariat for the organization of the meeting and for the preparation of the background papers to guide our discussion on an extreme matter of concern such as trafficking in persons for the removal of organs.

Armenia has set a comprehensive interagency approach and national mechanism in the fight against human trafficking and has implemented seven national programs with the latest one in 2023, which include also measures to prevent trafficking in persons for the purpose of organ removal.

Together with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Armenia's **legal framework is shaped by the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs**, which Armenia joined in 2018. Hence, the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia was brought into compliance with the international requirements setting out criminal responsibility for human trafficking and exploitation, including for the illegal circulation of human organs and tissues. Armenia effectively cooperates with the UN, OSCE and Council of Europe over combating human trafficking. After its last monitoring mission in Armenia GRETA particularly acknowledged in its report the improvements in the legislative and policy framework and **victims' access to justice and effective remedies**.

Victim-centered approach is key for the successful prevention, detection and combating of such crimes. National legislation of Armenia foresees measures for protecting witnesses and victims as well as preventative measures for ensuring transparency, promoting equal access to transplants. Armenia has established a Commission on Identification of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and Exploitation with the sole authority to recognize a person as a victim.

Although no cases of trafficking in persons for the organ removals were detected by authorities in Armenia in recent years, several factors have increased the risk for our nationals due to the latest regional developments. Among them is the forced displacement of 120,000 indigenous Armenians from their historical homeland in 2023. Forced displacement driven by war or aggression is one of the major factors that contributes **to an individual's vulnerability to trafficking**.

On the other hand, we are still facing the consequences of the 44-day large-scale war and following aggression against Armenia in 2022. Mutilations, dismembering of bodies are not the only war crimes committed by the perpetrator. The real number of captive Armenians during those aggressions, as well as abducted afterwards are still concealed and denied by the aggressor despite the video materials posted on social media during the captivities. Under such circumstances, there are serious suspicions that those captives and hostages may be subject to the trafficking of organs, slavery, and other criminal offenses.

Let me turn to the recommendations.

Recalling the UN Security Council Resolution 2388, we would like to underscore that certain offences associated with trafficking in persons in the context of armed conflict may constitute war crimes, such as the use of captives and hostages for the trafficking of organs and ask the Working Group and the Secretariat to increase the focus of the mentioned factors in its future work.

Armenia also underscores the importance of synergy between different UN agencies, as well as cooperation with CSOs and human rights organizations for the identification and implementation of effective measures and international responsibility for preventing the trafficking of organs or trafficking of persons for the purpose of organ removals in conflict-affected areas. We consider that this subject should be one of the priorities of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons.

I thank you, Mr. Chair.