

**Secretariat Opening Statement of the 12th Session of the
Working Group on Trafficking in Persons**

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Agenda item 1 (b): Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 12th Session of the Working Group on Trafficking in Persons of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Along with the Working Group on Smuggling of Migrants, these fora provide the most advanced State practitioner-led and policy-focused discussion on human trafficking and migrant smuggling at the global level in the UN system.

To date, 178 States are party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. This is testimony to the commitment of Member States to tackle this crime.

In fulfilling its mandate, UNODC continues to support Member States to effectively implement the Trafficking in Persons Protocol through its work at the global, regional and national levels through, among others, the provision of legislative assistance and support to States in the development of counter-

trafficking strategies and action plans. We also support the continual strengthening of the capacity of criminal justice actors to combat human trafficking and protect the persons who have been subjected to this abhorrent form of crime. We also foster international cooperation. In 2021, the Global Programme on Trafficking in Persons trained 3,540 criminal justice practitioners, governmental officials and civil society representatives. Moreover, the Programme reached 12 countries and a regional body (African Union) with legislative and policy development assistance and cooperated in the investigation of 23 cases of trafficking in persons across the globe. 55 countries were represented in technical cooperation activities addressing trafficking that were organized and/or contributed to by UNODC at national and regional levels.

To give you a few examples highlighting the impact of our technical assistance activities:

In 2021 and in the framework of the regional initiative *Transforming Alerts into Criminal Justice Responses to Combat Trafficking in Persons within Migration Flows* (TRACK4TIP), UNODC started the implementation of a training program to enhance the skills and capacities of 169 labour inspectors, law enforcement officials and prosecutors in Colombia, on the use of a mechanism for identification and referral of cases of human trafficking. These efforts resulted in 3 operations conducted in 2021-2022 by law enforcement officials, and 1 labour inspection that led to the arrest of 17 suspects and the rescue of 63 victims of

trafficking in persons. 40 victims were subjected to labour exploitation and 23 victims, including 7 children, to sexual exploitation. The cases are currently under investigation by the Colombian Attorney General's Office.

Moreover, in December 2021, UNODC published a global study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human trafficking. The study assessed how frontline anti-human trafficking organizations responded to the challenges posed by the pandemic and provided guidelines on how to prepare for future challenges. Besides the report in English language, UNODC issued a briefing paper with the key findings of the global study in Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish.

In this specific work and across all dimensions of the human trafficking issue, the guidance provided by the recommendations of the Working Group are indispensable to States' efforts to fully implement the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and impact, with some finality, on human trafficking across the globe.

Much work remains to be done in all regions. It takes time, accumulated experience and dedicated resources for national criminal justice systems to develop and sustain expertise to detect, investigate and successfully prosecute trafficking cases, and to truly and effectively act to assist and support victims.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a very successful meeting.

Thank you, Madam Chairs.