

Side Event Council of Europe and Austria: Trafficking in human beings- A severe form of violence against women and girls and a flagrant violation of human right

10 March 2014, 1:15- 2:30 p.m.

Remarks by Lakshmi Puri, Deputy Executive Director, UN Women

Good afternoon,

I would like to thank the Council of Europe and the Austrian Government for organizing this panel and for inviting UN Women to join its voice to those who are combatting trafficking in all its forms.

Trafficking is a pervasive problem that knows no borders and that continues to grow. As we have just heard, women and girls remain over-represented in all estimates on trafficked persons. Whether it is for forced labour or sexual exploitation, women and girls constitute a large share of trafficking in persons.

Last year, the Commission on the Status of Women recognized trafficking as an insidious form of violence against women, closely connected with transnational and national crime. It highlighted the need to address the root causes of trafficking in women and girls – the main one being of course gender-based inequalities and discrimination.

This year again, we expect the Commission to recognize trafficking in persons as an impediment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Making this linkage is crucial because, as we know, ending violence against women is a missing dimension in the MDGs and the structural causes of gender inequality have not been adequately addressed in the MDG framework. This has not only an obvious impact on achieving gender equality and women's rights – where progress has been too slow – but also on combating trafficking.

The MDG framework did not address some critical areas such as the disproportionate share of unpaid care work carried out by women and girls; women's lack of access to assets and productive resources; women's low participation in decision-making at all levels; sexual and reproductive health and rights; the unequal power relations between women and men; and discriminatory social norms, stereotypes and practices that continue to hold women and girls back. All these areas also make them more susceptible to trafficking, both for domestic servitude and sexual exploitation.

This is why it is critical that the post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals build on the lessons from the MDGs and ensure that the factors that make women and girls susceptible to being victims of crimes like trafficking are addressed in comprehensive and gender-responsive way.

We at UN Women are doing our best to engage with Member States and other stakeholders at every level so these very issues, in particular gender equality and gender mainstreaming, will be at the forefront of discussions on the post 2015 agenda.

We are also conducting inter-agency coordination efforts and supporting governments at the national and regional levels to implement strategies based on their international commitments that include support for the development of legal and policy frameworks, assisting with initiatives to prevent violence and developing capacity at the national level to identify and prosecute offenders.

Our work is multifaceted and far-reaching.

In Brazil, we supported the government in formulating its second National Plan to Fight Trafficking of Persons.

In India, we undertook a mapping study to identify vulnerable districts to trafficking of women and children on the basis of social, cultural, economic and environmental indicators.

In Viet Nam, we supported the National Assembly to verify and review the gender dimensions of its anti-trafficking laws.

In Cambodia, we conducted research on the link between poverty and trafficking, and supported women's groups in organizing training workshops for police and community leaders.

In Nigeria, we sensitized police officers to the issue of trafficking and trained them on anti-trafficking legislation, women's access to justice and addressing gender-based violence more broadly.

In East Asia, we developed toolkits to build the capacity of national and local practitioners, including women's organizations, to prevent and respond to trafficking crimes.

And, through our key priority areas such as ending violence against women and girls, encouraging the political participation and economic empowerment of women, UN Women addresses some of the root causes of trafficking.

Ensuring the human rights of all victims and survivors of violence, including those who have been subject to trafficking, is central to our efforts, as is ensuring their access to justice. Like the Council of Europe's Convention against trafficking we must, at the global level, take a victim-orientated perspective to anti-trafficking action and guarantee the rights of all victims.

Today, much trafficking occurs within the context of migration, especially in relation to domestic servitude – an issue of particular concern for women. UN Women also

works with Governments to ensure gender-sensitive labour and migration policies and programs which can protect and support migrant women workers at all stages of migration and also reduce trafficking.

We also need to ensure we continue to provide comprehensive services to all survivors of trafficking, not just those that cooperate in criminal justice processes, so that they can overcome the trauma and reintegrate into society.

I would like to conclude by stressing that we must all focus more on preventing crimes like trafficking and all other forms of violence against women and girls from happening. To do this, it is critical that we increase our efforts on preventive factors such as reducing poverty by increasing education for women and girls, creating more and decent jobs for women, providing social services and social protection, as well as generating a pervasive culture of respect for human rights and gender equality is critical.

This is what we all must continue to strive for in the immediate future, beyond the MDGs and into the next critical era of post 2015 and sustainable development.

Thank you.