

## **Joint Statement on the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons**

**As delivered by Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the OSCE Ambassador Neil Holland at the 1436<sup>th</sup> Permanent Council Meeting on 27 July 2023**

Thank you Mr. Chair,

I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the following countries: Canada, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, and my own country, the United Kingdom.

The 30<sup>th</sup> of July is the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. Human trafficking is a serious crime, a grave violation of human rights, and remains a serious threat to security, safety, and the rule of law in our countries. Every year, thousands of men, women, and children fall into the hands of traffickers, and it is those most vulnerable who are most often targeted.

The Russian Federation's illegal, unjustifiable and brutal war against Ukraine has caused the biggest displacement crisis in Europe since the Second World War. With high numbers of women and children internally displaced or seeking refuge outside Ukraine, traffickers and criminal networks seek to exploit their vulnerabilities amidst the chaos and turmoil caused by Russia's military aggression. The heightened risks of trafficking and exploitation unaccompanied minors and separated children face are particularly concerning.

Mr. Chair,

On a global scale, conflicts, humanitarian crises, socio-economic inequalities, and climate change are threatening livelihoods and leading to forced displacement, leaving millions of people worldwide exposed to the heightened risk of trafficking. As risks continue to grow, States must do more in their responses, particularly in victim detection and increasing convictions.

The theme of this year's World Day is "Reach every victim of trafficking, leave no one behind" and is a call to action in response to disturbing developments and trends of increasing ineffectiveness and impunity, detected by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and outlined at the OSCE Conference of the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons last April. To end the crime of human trafficking we must enhance our efforts to address root causes, identify and support victims, strengthen prevention, and end impunity.

Within this context it is imperative that we, the OSCE participating States, intensify all efforts to end trafficking and exploitation, bring traffickers to justice, support victims and survivors, and identify at-risk groups to prevent trafficking in the first place. Our anti-trafficking efforts must be based on a victim-centred, trauma-informed, gender-responsive, human rights-based approach, in partnership with survivors, civil society and the private sector.

Mr. Chair,

The OSCE is a valuable platform for coordinated responses and knowledge sharing to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings. We commend the tireless efforts of the OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and their appropriate and timely advocacy, projects, and policy recommendations in response to developments in our region.

The BeSafe Campaign that the OSCE, in co-operation with Thomson Reuters, launched last year will receive a new push on this year's World Day Against Trafficking in Human Beings. Previous humanitarian crises have shown that it often takes two years to start identifying large numbers of victims of exploitation. The campaign offers people fleeing Ukraine the tools to spot signs and minimise risks of potential human trafficking. It is one example of a tangible contribution the OSCE is offering to prevent the humanitarian crisis turning into a human trafficking crisis.

It is upon us to join forces to translate our commitment into concrete actions, working in close collaboration with the dedicated team at that OSCE. The toolbox and competencies of this organisation provide valuable support to improve the implementation of our OSCE commitments. This becomes even more relevant and pressing now so as to contribute to minimizing trafficking and exploitation risks of people impacted by the Russian Federation's military aggression against Ukraine.

While human trafficking thrives in the context of conflict or other situations characterised by impunity and the breakdown of institutions, we must bear in mind that no country is spared from this crime. We must be aware that trafficking happens everywhere, including in our streets, in our restaurants, in the products we buy, and in the services we consume. Let us remain vigilant and match our words with action to tackle this human rights crime.

I thank you.