

Mr. McHugh (Ireland):

I thank you for convening today's important debate, Mr. President. Ireland was proud to be a sponsor of resolution 2331 (2016), on trafficking in persons in conflict, when it was adopted in December, and today's debate is a crucial opportunity to continue that momentum. This is an issue that affects more than 21 million people worldwide, more than 5 million of them women and children, and it is therefore incumbent on us to do everything we can to address it.

I align myself fully with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union (EU). The EU has also taken a leading role in various policy and programme initiatives to prevent and combat human trafficking, and Ireland will continue to support those endeavours. I will make three points in my national capacity.

The first is that human trafficking is a reality and we must respond to it. Sensitization training and capacity-building should be at the core of our response to cases of human trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery. Security officials must know the signs to look for and the support to ask for. First responders must be sensitized in order to ensure that victims, especially women and girls, receive the medical and psychosocial care that they urgently need. Law-enforcement and legal officials must be aware of the rights and responsibilities involved in such cases. Civil-society organizations must be empowered to act as watchdogs throughout. An effective response to human trafficking also requires that partnerships be formed both within and across international and regional bodies. We are pleased to see the growing partnership between INTERPOL and the United Nations as one example of progress in that area. The work of United Nations regional offices in building partnerships with subregional organizations will also play a key role going forward.

Secondly, human trafficking will continue if we do not prioritize prevention. Ireland believes that impunity acts as a driver of human trafficking. We need to tackle that head-on and see accountability as a key to prevention. National systems must be equipped to uphold international and customary standards of justice in cases related to human trafficking and modern slavery. Moreover, we strongly believe that we need to focus more on the conditions that make people vulnerable to human traffickers, leading to their becoming trapped in cycles of forced labour or modern slavery. Poverty and economic hardship are major factors in that regard. That is why implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is crucial. Human trafficking is explicitly addressed in four of the Sustainable Development Goals, although implementation of all 17 Goals will ultimately be necessary if we are to tackle the root causes of the phenomenon. A stronger focus on sustaining peace, particularly in support given to conflict-prevention initiatives at the national, regional and international level, will also directly help to stem the tide of human trafficking.

Thirdly and lastly, we must take a gendered approach in responding to human trafficking. Human trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery force people into circumstances that no human being should have to endure. The effects on women and girls can be particularly harrowing. The New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants (General Assembly resolution 71/1) commits all States to ensuring that our responses to large movements of refugees and migrants mainstream a gender perspective. This does not simply entail instituting extra security and response measures; it also means ensuring women's participation in policies and programmes aimed at combating and preventing human trafficking.

This issue is a priority for Ireland. Our commitments are set out in our national action plan to prevent and combat human trafficking, now in its second phase. It was developed in consultation with national and international partners, including civil society, and sets out a clear, collaborative programme for advancing the fight against trafficking and enhancing the protection of victims. Raising public awareness is key to preventing and combating human trafficking. Ireland also provides funding to

various international and multilateral funds involved in combating the issue. Preventing human trafficking is an enormous challenge that requires the concerted efforts of all involved, and only through collaboration at the international, regional, bilateral and national levels will it be advanced.