

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*):

At the outset, we wish to offer our best wishes to the United Kingdom delegation for successfully guiding the work of the Security Council this month. We also thank Ukraine for the skill with which it led the work of the Council in February. We also extend our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his briefing, as well as to Messrs. Yuri Fedotov and Kevin Hyland and Ms. Ilwad Elman for their respective briefings.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela believes that it is necessary to point out that crimes of human trafficking, violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, modern slavery and forced labour are, from any standpoint, despicable practices that we firmly condemn, in particular because they have proliferated and spread in ongoing situations of armed conflict throughout the world, especially those promoted by terrorist groups and other violent non-State actors operating in the Middle East and North Africa, such as Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and Boko Haram. The terrorist actions carried out by these organizations have caused a human tragedy, whose main victims have unfortunately been the most vulnerable — women, girls, boys — who have been caught up in wars that they did not start and have become commodities for these criminal trafficking networks.

This barbarity is a serious obstacle to the long-sought peace for which we have fought so hard in our respective national and regional environments. That is why the United Nations is the best forum to work together to prevent and combat the spread of this type of crime by addressing its root causes. We urge all international actors to take effective action to eradicate this scourge. We cannot let human life be used as spoils of war by these criminals. This is a truth that cannot be ignored, in particular by all those who incite and promote armed intervention and conflicts. Those who are responsible should, at all levels, must be held accountable before the law.

Despite the fact that this terrible crime and its related practices affect all States to some degree, the way it is discussed in the Security Council — namely, in the context of armed conflict — requires us to recognize that one of the reasons that there has been a worsening of this crime in recent years has been the destruction of State capacities in the countries concerned as a result of interventionism by those countries that foster the overthrow of Governments, destroy the social, political and economic fabric and create conditions for the expansion of international terrorism, which today threatens international peace and security, while violating the human rights of civilian populations affected by those countries' criminal actions. That is the case of Iraq, Libya, Syria and the countries of the Sahel, to mention but a few, where today their leaders and peoples are fighting diligently to restore peace and stability following armed foreign interventions, which has led to major trauma and human suffering.

We must not forget the fact that this is not a new phenomenon, nor is it exclusive to terrorist groups. The great Powers of the world have been the cause of and main protagonists in promoting war throughout contemporary history. They are also the principal manufacturers and marketers of weapons. They are the ones who need limitless natural resources, which they seek in all circumstances, in order to meet their unbridled appetite for consumption. They are the ones who are primarily responsible for the excesses of war, causing the massive flows of refugees, sexual exploitation against civilians, forced labour and modern slavery. The sponsors of these tragedies will be called on to answer for their acts before the law and will be judged by history.

Venezuela will never relent in its demands on the various actors of the international community to put an end to the supply of financial and logistical support and weapons to terrorist groups and other violent non-State actors that promote the crime of trafficking in persons, enslaving men and women and using them as active participants in armed conflicts, exploiting them in numerous ways and exacerbating the cycle of suffering and death. We have had enough with two-faced morality and

double standards in assessing and combating crimes associated with trafficking in persons in conflict situations. We must condemn human trafficking and modern slavery, but we must also recognize that this firm condemnation goes hand in hand with concrete actions that involve putting an end to activities of those who sponsor conflicts clandestinely or openly for their own political and economic ends.

In this context, we must tackle the root causes of these conflicts, as they foster the vulnerability that makes people victims of trafficking. We must establish effective accountability mechanisms and restore the economic and social fabric of countries in post-conflict situations. We must reinforce States' role in promoting stability, eradicating poverty, economic development and social inclusion, which in the end are the true structuring factors for preventing traffickers who incite human suffering out of petty interests from continuing to thrive in the midst of armed conflict and even in peaceful situations.

The United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons is a point of reference and a step forward in outlining the international commitments to eliminating this scourge. Further, the review of the Plan of Action, which will be held in 2017, means that we must renew and increase the will of all States to fully comply with the inalienable duty to combat this crime, expand preventive mechanisms, ensure accountability, and gather data and evidence.

In addition, we welcome the initiative that this complex phenomenon is being discussed in the Security Council, and in particular the recent adoption of resolution 2331 (2016) last December, but we believe that it is crucial to recognize that the leading role for taking up this issue belongs to the General Assembly, in which all States actively participate, taking into account the multidimensional and cross-cutting nature of the scourge. Discussion should be focused primarily on the prevention and eradication of trafficking in persons, bearing in mind the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular respect for the sovereignty and self-determination of peoples.