



Reports on the 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 3: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery

16 September 2020

Mr. Tomoya Obokata - Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery:

Summary of the report ([A/HRC/45/8](#)):

The report outlines the activities carried out by the Special Rapporteur, including the activities of the previous mandate holder, Ms Urmila Bhoola. The report includes:

- Preliminary analysis of the **impact of coronavirus on contemporary forms of slavery**.
- An overview of the methods of work that the new Special Rapporteur intends to implement and promote during his tenure.

In his recommendations, the Special Rapporteur urges States to adopt measures to ensure that **victims/survivors of slavery can access services, justice, and remedy** even during the **pandemic**. The report also informs that **eleven communications** were transmitted jointly with other mandates on behalf of individuals exposed to contemporary forms of slavery.

The socio-economic effects of Covid-19 are multi dimensional. Globally, we observe a **loss of employment** which is in turn likely to **worsen poverty and inequality**, and **increases instances of slavery** and forced labour around the world.

Vulnerabilities of groups such as **informal workers, women, children, minorities, indigenous people, refugees, Internally Displaced Persons** and **migrant workers** are exacerbated.

Covid-19 caused some **businesses to exploit workers**. Examples of **labour rights violations** have been reported around the world. Labour and social protection laws are being relaxed or suspended during the pandemic. States risk to pay a high price for **removing people's protection and dignity at work**. Trends show that in some countries, access to justice and remedies have been disrupted for victims of exploitation.

Member states are under the obligation to **mitigate the impact of Covid-19**. Throughout the pandemic, international human rights law continues to apply and the prohibition of slavery and forced labour must remain a non-derogable right

Country visit to Togo by the former Special Rapporteur, Ms Urmila Bhoola:

The visit of the former Special Rapporteur focused on the **worst forms of child labour in Togo**.

Togo is a signatory of several human rights instruments, including ICCPR, CRC and ILO Convention on Worst Forms of Child Labour. **Togo has a solid legislative framework to combat child labour**. After the visit, Togo adopted an action plan to combat child labour and efforts have been intensified in awareness raising.

Despite these encouraging developments, **child labour is still widespread in Togo**. **Poverty and inequality**, as well as **cultural and social elements** are driving factors child labour. For instance, a large number of children engage in domestic work under the "**confiage system**". Other types of child labour are observed in sectors such as agriculture, construction and hazardous industries.

In addition to child labour, other forms of contemporary slavery remain in Togo. **Child marriage** remain an issue of concern. In addition, many children are **abused as part of religious practices**.

The former SR calls on Togo to end child exploitation, and work in close **collaboration with civil society**.

Togo (country concerned):

Togo thanks the Special Rapporteur for his report and acknowledges his remarks. The question of child labour is at the **heart of Togo's policies**. Togo has a solid legal framework to protect children including the **children's code** (2007). To improve child protection, Togo adopted a **strategy on child well being** in 2019 and a **national action plan** on child labour.

Regarding concerns about impunity where children are placed under the *confiage system*, Togo seeks to address this issue as a **priority**. Action is underway in the communities in order to facilitate initiatives and detect **vulnerable populations and victims**. There is a **hotline for children** who are needing assistance. It remains a challenge because this system is deep rooted in society. Togo is taking an inclusive comprehensive approach to ensure these issues related to child labour are addressed.

Interactive Dialogue (full webcast available [HERE](#))

37 delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue.

Delegations welcomed Mr Tomoya Obokata in his **new role of Special Rapporteur** (SR). His report on Covid-19 and contemporary forms of slavery was widely appreciated by the delegations present in the room. States commended the SR for highlighting the **link between Covid-19 and modern slavery**.

Most of the speakers during the interactive dialogue, agreed that it was concerning to see how Covid-19 exacerbated **unemployment, extreme poverty** and **inequalities**, which in turn exacerbated **contemporary forms of slavery** all around the world.

Delegations also expressed concerns about the impact of the pandemic on **vulnerable populations** already subject to slavery-like practices: **women, children, migrant workers, workers in the informal economy, elderly people, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, asylum seekers, internally displaced people**.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (37 delegations):

Human Rights Council members: Pakistan, Armenia, Mauritania, India, Japan, Indonesia, Libya, Senegal, Ukraine, Australia, Cameroon, Venezuela, Nepal, Uruguay, Philippines.

Observer states: European Union, Norway (*on behalf of Nordic and Baltic countries*), Liechtenstein, Sovereign Order of Malta, UN Women, France, Iraq, Morocco, China, Iran, Belgium, Malaysia, Paraguay, Lebanon, Greece, United Kingdom, Egypt, Tunisia, Bolivia, Chad, South Africa.

10 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) took the floor during the interactive dialogue.

The civil society shared its concerns over the **impact of Covid-19 on slavery around the world** and underlined the **interconnexion between the pandemic, extreme poverty and slavery**.

NGOs were also concerned about the **fate of vulnerable groups of population**, more exposed to slavery during the pandemic. They emphasized the need to **extend labour protection** mechanisms such as **social protection**, to these vulnerable groups.

Some speakers denounced that **responses by businesses** themselves in some part of the world were **exacerbating exploitation** of vulnerable groups. Other speakers deplored **gaps** in the different **government responses** around the world to combat modern slavery.

Civil Society Organizations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (3 NGOs):

Anti-Slavery International, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Action Canada for Population and Development, Minority Rights Group, International Humanist and Ethical Union, Prahar, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd (Joint Statement), Conectas Human Rights, Network of Unity and Human Development, Support of Youth in Human Rights, EAFORD.