

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 56th SESSION

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children

27 June 2024

Ms. Siobhán Mullally, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, gave a detailed report on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, on human trafficking, mixed migration, and maritime protection clarifying the issue. This research underlines that, **regardless of the complications associated with jurisdictional issues and the rising criminalization of migration, international law sets clear obligations for all actors pertaining to the maritime sector with respect to preventing trafficking and protecting survivors.** Of particular concern has been the record number of migrant deaths in 2023, with over 8,565 deaths on migratory routes across the world, more than half of whom drowned. It has been shown that punitive responses to seaborne migration—those that open up space for serious human rights violations, **limit access to legal and safe channels of migration, and access asylum procedures—enhance the risks of trafficking.** Therefore, there should be an expansion in the availability of safe and regular options for migration, as well as effective access to asylum procedures. The Special Rapporteur therefore insisted on **search and rescue obligations being carried out without any type of discrimination,** taking due care that victims are disembarked at a safe location that respects their rights. The identification and referral mechanisms, direct unconditional assistance to victims, and residence procedures, which would not be dependent on cooperation in criminal proceedings, were also underlined in the report.

The paper also documents the vulnerabilities of children—particularly the unaccompanied and separated kids—who require greater child protection measures. Many of the challenges people with disabilities face are discussed, along with the need to firmly prevent human trafficking at sea through the use of technology. A halt is called on the criminalization of human rights activists who assist migrants and refugees at sea. The Special Rapporteur concluded by calling on states to redouble efforts at preventing trafficking, through extending safe migration routes and refugee protection and reducing the risks involved in hazardous sea voyages.

Interactive dialogue

The interactive dialogue included **38 country delegates.** Many countries showed deep concern about human trafficking, particularly with regard to sea arrivals. In fact, there was broad consensus on the need for urgent, well-coordinated international action with a view to preventing trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, especially women and children. Countries underlined the importance of tackling the root causes of migration, expanding legal avenues for migration, reinforcing enforcement, strengthening victim support, and trying to identify victims. Many appealed for increased international cooperation while touting national efforts, but even as approaches differed, trafficking was universally recognized to be a complex and international problem that could be addressed only through concerted state action.

Multiple states – from Nigeria to Albania and Armenia – expressed their serious concern with the alarming increase of human trafficking, particularly women and children, associated with dangerous smuggling routes to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea and beyond. There was broad agreement – from **Australia to Burkina Faso to Costa Rica –** that measures needed to be taken urgently and jointly to prevent and combat human trafficking and to protect the victims. Various countries, including **France and Luxembourg,** underscored the importance of addressing the root causes; developing safe, orderly, and regular migratory routes; non-discrimination; and the protection of victim rights. With respect to maritime interceptions and disembarkations, **Morocco and Panama** emphasized the need

to improve identification and assistance to the victims of trafficking in persons. **Egypt** sought to expand international cooperation in combating human trafficking. It emphasized that there was a need for more international cooperation and implementation of best practices. According to it, it is important to mobilize a variety of international players to share the global burden of this problem. It called for greater capabilities and capacities at all levels, increased collaboration, and the broad use of tested measures for counter-trafficking.

There was some dispute over the best tactics, with some countries such as **Ecuador and Cameroon** stressing prevention, awareness-raising, and countering socio-economic factors, while others such as **Malawi and Bulgaria** focused on bolstering criminal justice and policing responses. A number of states detailed their legislative initiatives, action plans, and institutional mechanisms targeting human trafficking, including **Algeria, Romania, and Eswatini**. A few of them, including **Jamaica and Australia**, called for enhanced information-sharing, capacity-building, and international cooperation. **Morocco** condemned the criminalization of migration. **Lithuania** expressed concern about the complicity of the state in trafficking. Countries such as **Switzerland** have insisted that traffickers be held to account, that victims have a claim, and that survivors be given greater roles in anti-trafficking activities. Some countries, like **South Africa and Sierra Leone**, stated views on the need to combat racism and anti-migrant bias. More than a few – including **Paraguay** and other landlocked countries – asked how they could get involved when they know nothing about maritime trafficking. In the main, it was agreed – as people from **Namibia and Togo** have stated – that trafficking is a tangled international issue that requires effort from countries of origin, transit, and destination.

Many NGOs have reacted to human trafficking, particularly in maritime contexts. **Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII and Caritas Internationalis** stressed the need to open safe migration routes and the urgency of better-identifying victims of trafficking. **Defence for Children International** pointed out that detention is harmful to child victims of trafficking. **China Great Wall Society** affirmed that cross-border trafficking requires international cooperation to combat it. Some, like **Friends World Committee for Consultation**, called for more accountability and investigations of human rights violations against migrants. The **National Human Rights Commission of India** explained the legal framework of India against trafficking. Many delegations, including the **Network of Women's Nongovernmental Organizations in Iran**, pointed to technology's new role in contemporary trafficking and a need for strategies updated to meet it.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (38 country delegations):

Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Australia, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Egypt, Eswatini, France, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Oman, Panama, Paraguay, Qatar on behalf of Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), Romania, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Vanuatu, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (11):

Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, Caritas Internationalis (International Confederation of Catholic Charities), China Great Wall Society, Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, Defence for Children International, Friends World Committee for Consultation, Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice delle Salesiane di Don Bosco, National Human Rights Commission of India, Network of Women's Non-governmental Organizations in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Réseau Africain pour le Développement, la Gouvernance et les Droits Humains (RADHEG), Réseau Unité Pour le développement de Mauritanie.

To watch the full meeting refer to the [UN WEB TV](#).