***ILO Statement at the CEDAW half-day of General Discussion on trafficking of women and girls in the context of global migration***

***22 February 2019***

1. For many women and girls of legal working age, migration is an empowering experience, opening up new opportunities to secure decent work and realize their potential. There were 258 million international migrants in 2017, an increase of almost 50 per cent since 2000. Of these, 164 million were migrant workers, 68 million of whom women. Most migration is linked directly or indirectly to the search for good job opportunities and has a positive impact on individuals and societies.

For some, however, global migration goes terribly wrong.

1. According to the ILO’s 2017 Global Estimates of Forced labour, there are some 25 million people in forced labour. Women and girls are disproportionately affected, accounting for 99% of victims in the commercial sex industry. An appalling one million children are trapped in commercial sexual exploitation. Women and girls account for 58% of those trapped in forced labour in other sectors such as domestic labour and construction.
2. It is important that, in reciting such statistics, we do not lose sight of the human face of those who suffer these abuses. We are talking about women who migrate, often with their families, in order to become tenant farmers. They work without any formal arrangements, purchasing seeds and fertilizer on credit with the promise of payment, minus the cost of the inputs, at the end of the season. Because they are illiterate, these women do not have the ability to negotiate input and crop prices nor the terms of their employment. They bear all the risk if crops fail. When they earn less than the price of inputs, they are trapped in a cycle of debt bondage that may even be passed onto their daughters and sons.
3. Consider also the situation faced by many women and girls who migrate for domestic labour: working in private homes, outside the reach of labour inspection or any other state protection, they are too often subject to long hours, low wages, wage theft, or even no pay at all, disrespect, and psychological and physical abuse. Their passports may be confiscated, and, unable to leave, they are effectively trapped in modern day slavery.
4. When women and girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation, it is a major violation of their human rights and a vicious crime. It is also big business: ILO research indicates that two thirds of the estimated total of US$ 150 billion of illegal profits derived from trafficking in persons and forced labour, that is US$ 99 billion, come from commercial sexual exploitation. These women and girls may have willingly placed themselves in the hands of smugglers and become trafficked along the way; they are made vulnerable by language barriers, the challenges they face when trying to integrate, and their limited knowledge of their new surroundings.
5. The ILO is celebrating its Centenary anniversary this year. In its Constitution, the ILO resolved to protect "the interests of workers employed in countries other than their own". 100 years ago, the first ILO Convention dealing with child labour was adopted, to protect children from exploitation in industries like construction and mining. It is an abject failure that children are still trafficked to work in these industries and a reminder of the urgency with which we must now act.
6. A robust international legal architecture underpins our efforts. The ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) defines “forced or compulsory labour” as “all work or service that is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily”. In conjunction with the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105), and the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, the ILO provides a legal framework well suited to tackling trafficking of women and girls in the contemporary global economy.
7. All forms of slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, are prohibited by ILO Convention 182 on Worst Forms of Child Labour, adopted in 1999. With only three countries remaining to ratify, we have a realistic chance of achieving universal ratification this year.
8. The ILO has also developed specific international standards for the governance of labour migration and protection of migrant workers. These are the Migration for Employment Convention, 1949 (No. 97) and the Migrant Workers Convention, 1975 (No. 143). Instruments containing specific provisions on migrant workers include the [Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181)](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312326), and the [Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:2551460:NO)
9. It is clear that given the scope and international nature of the problem, no one actor working alone will succeed in tackling these problems: partnerships are essential.
10. The Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 calls upon the international community to respond urgently to these challenges, specifically SDG Target 8.7, which calls for immediate measures to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking by 2030, and end child labour in all its forms by 2025. The Global Compact on Migration provides another key policy framework and concretely advances the human rights of migrants, including to be free from forced labour and trafficking.
11. In 2016, the multi-stakeholder Alliance 8.7 was launched, with the aim of increasing collaborative action on Target 8.7, ensuring acceleration, focus and coherence; driving innovation and scaling up solutions; and providing a platform to engage in dialogue and to share knowledge and information. Alliance 8.7 includes a Migration Action Group, a group of governments, protection actors, employment bodies, workers’ organizations, academia, human rights experts and business networks to promote coordinated action to tackle forced and child labour in the context of migration.
12. The ILO’s Fair Recruitment Initiative, which aims to build a fair recruitment regime, is another important initiative. FAIR puts social dialogue at the centre and works to enhance knowledge of recruitment practices worldwide; to improve laws, policies and enforcement mechanisms; promote fair business practices; and empower and protect all workers.
13. Promoting education, fair recruitment, safe migration and decent work, the ILO Work in Freedom programme adopts an integrated and targeted approach to prevent trafficking of women and girls in South Asian countries of origin and in selected destination countries. By providing women with educational support and training on rights and skills, the programme is increasing their livelihood alternatives - either enhancing their ability to access or create local employment opportunities or allowing them to choose to migrate as well-informed, skilled workers with higher income-earning potential abroad.
14. Colleagues, more than ever before, we are well aware of the scope and nature of trafficking of women and girls in global migration; we have a well-developed body of international law to address it and frameworks for collaboration and knowledge sharing. What is urgently needed now is accelerated action.