***Check against delivery***



**Statement by Ms. Mama Fatima SINGHATEH**

**SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE SALE, SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN,**

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Third Committee

Item: Sixty-nine

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Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

I am honoured to present my thematic report to the UN General Assembly as the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 76/147.

Chairperson,

I would like to begin by extending my gratitude to the Governments of The Philippines and Uruguay for the invitation accorded to me and the subsequent official visits I respectively undertook in December 2022 and May 2023. The full reports for both visits with my conclusions and recommendations will be presented to the upcoming session of the Human Rights Council in March 2024. I also wish to express my appreciation to the Governments of Australia and Botswana for the invitations accorded to me and I look forward to engaging in constructive dialogues with the Governments during my country visits to Australia later this month and to Botswana in the first quarter 2024.

Your Excellencies,

Huge strides have been made to protect children within the travel and tourism sector notwithstanding the fact that their vulnerability continues to grow as the sector continues to expand.

Global travel and tourism have more than doubled in the past 30 years, and there has been an unprecedented growth in technological advancements and in travel and new forms of tourism and travel products such as voluntourism that put children at risk of exploitation. This growth in the travel sector has expanded across the globe and has outpaced efforts to respond to it at national and international levels leaving child protection regulations lagging behind. It is in an effort to address this concern that I present this thematic report on the phenomenon of sexual exploitation and abuse of children through voluntourism.

Excellencies,

Voluntourism is short for volunteer tourism. It is a form of tourism in which travellers participate in voluntary work usually for charity, and it revolves around products offered through travel and tourism markets usually for unskilled volunteers, with no supervision and no criminal background checks required as an alternative to mass tourism.

My report highlights the prevalence, characteristics, and adverse effects of voluntourism by underscoring that while the concept of volunteering is premised on noble intentions, the manifestations of exploitation and sexual abuse of children within this sector are by now well acknowledged. This is based on the fact that children are increasingly vulnerable, particularly in settings where legal protection is weak and child protection systems are inadequate or contain loopholes. As child safeguarding measures vary significantly across sending and receiving countries of volunteers, gaps arise with respect to their applicability, causing vulnerabilities of children to exploitation and sexual abuse.

The adverse effects of voluntourism have been recorded as a recurrent problem over the past decade across several countries in the global south. The phenomenon has outpaced efforts to respond at national, regional and international levels. Gaps in legal frameworks, together with the transnational nature of this phenomenon and limited capacity, data and information on this issue are some of the many challenges that exist to responding to this problem.

Despite the persistent challenges, I provided some examples of positive practices associated with various steps that have been taken by different stakeholders to address these challenges to preventing the exploitation and sexual abuse of children in the context of voluntourism. Some of these developments include the formulation, strengthening and implementation of child safeguarding standards that tackle and respond to this problem. Others include scaling up efforts in awareness raising, information sharing, developing guidelines, coordinating multi-stakeholder programmes, and the vetting and background checks of volunteers. Developing a robust database to collect information on voluntourism, as well as empowering communities, investing in capacity building and ensuring sustainable child support are other good practices that can be implemented effectively to respond to this problem.

Excellencies,

I provided some recommendations for governments and other stakeholders. These include a demonstration of strong political commitment through the funding and implementation of comprehensive legal frameworks and standards, to prevent and combat the exploitation and sexual abuse of children through voluntourism. I also recommended that governments put in place measures that prohibit the use of unskilled and untrained volunteers in childcare institutions and facilities; regulate the private sector within the travel and tourism industry to ensure compliance with business and child rights obligations and implement the “do no harm” principle in all policy making and actions. Governments can also penalize those entities including agencies, tour operators and tourism companies, that provide voluntourism services for profit without putting in place requirements for screening and vetting their volunteers.

Governments working with other stakeholders can promote alternative solutions that provide meaningful support to children, work towards the deinstitutionalization of children and provide services that would prevent separating children from their parents or families**.**

Excellencies,

To effectively deliver the targets under the 2030 Agenda, which includes promoting sustainable tourism and ending violence against children, governments working with businesses and other stakeholders must ensure that the business and human rights principles of *protect, respect and remedy* are at the heart of any corporate existence and function.

These principles must serve as a benchmark for all stakeholders to tackle and respond to the exploitation and sexual abuse of children within the travel and tourism industry.

Furthermore, governments must take steps to regulate and monitor how funding is sourced and received for care institutions for children, to better protect children, including their families, from exploitation.

Addressing child sexual abuse and exploitation in the tourism sector, is necessary to ensure that all forms of tourism is innovative, responsible, and sustainable for the planet, peace and prosperity.

I thank you for your kind attention.

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