**Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**

**72nd Session**

General Debate on Human Trafficking in the context of global migration

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Oral statement by: Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ)

Ms Chairperson,

We thank the Committee for having a discussion about this important topic and for inviting NGOs to participate.

Trafficking of human beings is one of the main and most insidious form of contemporary slavery and it is extremely challenging to address because it results from a complex interaction of different factors. It therefore requires a multidisciplinary and integrated approach. We would like to highlight just three aspects of addressing the problem – **prevention**, **legal status** of victims, and countries experiencing **conflict** – based on examples in three countries as described in our joint written submission.

In order to assist the Committee in elaborating strategies to supress trafficking, we want to begin with highlighting the importance of establishing successful prevention mechanisms. Prevention tackles the crime at its roots, such as conditions leading to migration, that give rise to human trafficking. We believe that trafficking prevention strategies must begin with proper research into the local conditions and include information collection and sharing mechanisms, as well as cooperation protocols among government entities and with civil society organizations.

**The case of Nepal** shows how economic conditions are not the single root cause of human trafficking, but also social factors play an important role. Lack of education and false expectations and beliefs about the outside world contribute to trafficking risk, which is further exacerbated by the isolation of some communities in remote areas. Since traffickers often prey on people’s ignorance, we believe that education plays a crucial role in any trafficking prevention strategy.

Education and an appropriate messaging should be focused on both the potential victims and their families and communities. Since young victims are often easier to recruit, we point out that a child-focused approach is needed as well.

The status of victims and legal processes available to migrants also becomes a critical factor in addressing the crime. Indeed, some countries not only face trafficking of their own citizens but also large flows of foreigners being trafficked. The situation is clearly showed by the example of Tunisia, where the illegal status of migrants makes them particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of domestic servitude and sexual exploitation.

Since some of these migrants might be qualified as refugees, it is particularly important to develop a solid legal framework to regulate and process claims for asylum, in order to guarantee the access to fundamental rights. Without these mechanisms and without institutions providing support to refugees, they become more vulnerable to human trafficking practices.

**Retention centres in Tunisia**, where people without a legal status are held, are places where traffickers can easily lure victims. Indeed, detained migrants may become desperate to leave the center and return to their country, thereby becoming more likely to accept money from traffickers and ending up in debt bondage or a similar situation. In addition, retention centres may become places where trafficking victims are further victimized. It is therefore important to establish mechanisms aimed at identifying at-risk groups.

The risk of trafficking due to migration is exacerbated in societies experiencing armed conflict since it creates a broad context of violence and instability that drives people to migrate in large numbers. **In the case of Iraq**, the 2003 invasion and subsequent occupation uprooted millions of people and resulted in millions of Iraqi women and girls becoming victims of trafficking and other violence. At the same time, the UN has had a sustained presence in the country, now in the form of UNAMI.

We believe that when a conflict or post-conflict situation includes a UN mission or other lasting presence, there are opportunities for the host state to benefit from the resources and expertise offered by the UN to address human rights issues such as trafficking. However, the situation in Iraq has shown that this does not necessarily happen. This has been due, to a great extent, by the lack of clear political will by the Iraqi government to prioritize the issue and create a plan for addressing it. There has also been an unfortunate lack of insistence by the UN mission for the government to tackle the issue. It is critically important for States having a UN presence to proactively make use of UN resources to help satisfy their international obligations. As well, the UN should ensure that its ongoing missions are able to provide meaningful assistance to the host states in preventing human trafficking.

We again thank the Committee for welcoming our participation, and we look forward to the outcome of this discussion.

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