

## **Opening remarks by the Chairperson of the Fund**

### **Expert Panel on the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery:**

#### **“Revealing the Child Faces of Modern Slavery”**

Dear High Commissioner,

Dear Ms Urmila Bhoola,

Distinguished panellists,

Distinguished guests,

On behalf of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Contemporary Forms of Slavery, I would like to welcome you to the Expert Panel commemorating the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, as well as the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Fund since its establishment by the General Assembly in 1991. At the outset, I would like to thank the governments of Australia and Germany for their support to this important event that will shed light particularly on the child victims of modern-day slavery, thus the title of the event ‘Revealing the Child Faces of Modern Slavery’.

Slavery is not merely a memory of the past, but is a painful reality of the present that affects an estimated 21 million people worldwide, with over one-quarter of those being children. Resulting from conditions of extreme poverty, deeply rooted ideological beliefs, as well as conflicts and humanitarian crises, the number of children who fall victim to modern slavery is ever-increasing. While being removed from a life of freedom and dignity, children are deprived of the fundamentals of childhood, a right that they are both morally and legally entitled to. States have the obligation to uphold these rights and to implement the necessary steps to eradicate all forms of modern slavery, for once and for all.

The United Nations Voluntary Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery is uniquely mandated to assist victims of modern slavery, including children. Through a human-rights based and victim-centred approach, the Fund awards annual grants to support initiatives at the ground-level providing humanitarian, medical, psychological, legal, and financial aid to victims. In 2016, the Fund granted a total of US\$ 580 100 to 42 organizations around the world in 34 countries. 29,000 victims are being assisted; more than a third of these victims are children.

At its last session in 2015, the Board defined a new policy for the Fund for the next five years, based on: prioritizing *specialized* assistance to victims, in particular legal redress; prioritizing women and children, in particular in situations of conflict and humanitarian crises; awarding larger grants, and framing its work within Sustainable Development Goal # 8.7, in cooperation with other relevant actors (in particular the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery).

Today’s event will combine the extensive knowledge and lived experiences of an esteemed panel of experts and practitioners from organizations supported by the Fund.

We are particularly thankful to the High Commissioner for Human Rights for his presence here today. I would also like to thank Ms Urmila Bhoola, the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery for her cooperation with the Fund and for bringing her insights to the topic at end.

This event is intended to provide awareness and knowledge-sharing through meaningful dialogue and productive exchange.

With that, I now give the floor to High Commissioner, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein. Further, we will hear from our expert panel in this order:

- James Kofi Annan, a former child victim of trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, and now the founder and President of *Challenging Heights* in Ghana. His organization works to rescue, rehabilitate, and reintegrate child victims of slavery;
- Ms. Urmila Bhoola, who has over 20 years of experience as a labour and human rights lawyer in Asia Pacific, specifically South Africa, where she also served as a Judge of the South African Labour Court for 5 years. She assumed her mandate as Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences in 2014;
- Loretta Bondi, the Director of International Projects for the *BeFree Social Cooperative*, an organization based in Italy that provides legal and psychological assistance to female victims of trafficking;
- Ashif Shaikh, the founder of a leading human rights organization, *Jan Sahas*, which works towards the eradication of manual scavenging and promotes empowerment of Dalit, along with other socially excluded communities in India;
- Katy Robjant, who is a clinical psychologist who currently manages a project in Eastern DRC working with victims of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and former combatants including former child soldiers.
- Mary Read, who currently serves as the Head of the Advocacy and Partnership Unit within the ILO's Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch and brings and her extensive experience working with the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour

After the panellists' presentations, which will take up to 45 minutes, we will open an interactive segment of questions and answers, which we hope will be enriching and insightful for all.

Thank you and I look forward to our interactive discussions.

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