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Statement of UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery including its consequences and causes, Urmila Bhoola

Speech for 2 December 2016 to the expert panel convened by the UN Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary forms of slavery on the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

It is an honour for me to participate in this event and address you on the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery.

I would like to thank the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for the kind invitation extended to me and for focusing today's events on the child victims of slavery. In my two years as UN Special Rapporteur, I have on many occasions seen the devastation of the human spirit caused by the continued existence of the institutions and practices of slavery, but it is the faces of the child victims that I recall with the most pain. The impact of slavery on all children, but particularly on girls, causes untold permanent damage to their physical, mental, emotional and intellectual wellbeing and deprives them of a most valuable experience – childhood. During a joint mission with two other SRs to Nigeria in February this year, I met with girls who had been enslaved by Boko Haram, forced into marriage, domestic servitude and sexual slavery and boys forced to carry weapons during terrorist attacks on their own villages. When I visited El Salvador in April this year, I received multiple reports of girls forced into situations of de-facto sexual slavery by ruthless gangs, boys forced into criminal activities, as well as manifestations of the worst forms of child labour, including forced begging on the streets and children in domestic servitude. We visited mangrove swamps where children accompanied their parents to earn a living by working in gruelling and hazardous work harvesting shellfish, the constant exposure to water and smoke to keep mosquitos away causing multiple illnesses. During my mission to Niger in 2014, I was again faced with the many instances of exploitation of children through slavery-like practices. These included girls sold as slaves under the “wahaya” or “fifth wife” practice or forced into domestic servitude or child marriage, boys forced to beg on the streets by so-called religious teachers and worst forms of child labour in artisanal gold mining.

Whilst these manifestations of child slavery differ from country to country – they all have one thing in common – the denial of the most basic and fundamental human rights of those we are obliged to protect - through extreme exploitation that leaves a deep and lasting impact on their dignity, their safety and their ability to serve as future contributors to society. As governments, civil society, corporations and individuals we have a legal, civic, moral and ethical duty to protect the rights of the child. We must do more to remove children from slavery, address the root causes that push them into slavery, ensure their effective rehabilitation, reintegration and psycho-social wellbeing and involve them as equal partners in creating a sustainable and inclusive society premised on development and social justice.

This year also marks the 90th and 60th anniversaries respectively of the 1926 Slavery Convention and the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave trade and Institutions and

Practices similar to slavery. These legal standards remain relevant touchstones to ensure state accountability for abolishing and eliminating all contemporary forms of slavery, including forced labour, the worst forms of child labour, forced and servile marriage, bonded labour, servitudes and other slavery-like practices.

Whilst international days and anniversaries give us room for celebration of success, they also provide opportunity for retrospection. As I highlighted when I addressed the 33rd session of the Human Rights Council in September - the global decrease in the number of children engaged in the worst forms of child labour, the enhanced national and international legal framework for addressing slavery (for example the UK's Modern Slavery Act and the ILO's Forced Labour Protocol), increased efforts to ensure business accountability for slavery in supply chains, as well as to efforts to ensure justice for victims of slavery - are worthy of celebration. However, the fact that millions of adults and children continue to be subjected to slavery and slavery-like practices means that we must do much more.

In this context, Goal 8 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda presents a unique opportunity to co-ordinate and intensify global efforts to address the multiple situations in which the persistence of contemporary forms of slavery impedes our progress. Achieving Target 8.7, which calls on the global community to "take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms," will lead to sustainable and inclusive development underpinned by human rights and social justice. The increased global momentum to end slavery, including through increased ratifications of the ILO's Forced Labour Protocol and compliance with the Anti-Slavery Conventions, is critical for the future of our children, our people and our planet, and it will only be made possible through creation of decent work, economic empowerment, full and productive employment, as well as the full realisation of fundamental human rights of adults and children alike.

I would like to conclude by congratulating the Trust Fund on 25 years of support to victims of slavery and recognise the key role that it has played in the global efforts to end slavery. The Fund's support to organisations working to ensure rehabilitation and secure access to justice to victims fulfils a critical need. I will continue to urge governments, philanthropic funds and other donors to provide support for its work. This will ensure that the Fund reaches more victims, and its work - together with increased government and business accountability, civil society initiatives to ensure prevention and raise awareness, criminal justice to end impunity, and philanthropic funding of interventions - will intensify global momentum to turn the tide against slavery.

We can do more. We must do more. We owe it to our children and the future generations who will inherit our world.