

World Day Against Trafficking in Persons
30 July 2023

**Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and climate justice
essential to prevention of trafficking in persons**

Statement by UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, Siobhán Mullally

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is essential to effective prevention of trafficking in persons, especially of children. The stagnation and reversal of progress on more than half the Sustainable Development Goal targets has serious implications for global peace and security. The consequences of failure to achieve the sustainable development goals include failures of prevention, protection and accountability for victims and survivors of human trafficking.

Human Rights protection lies at the heart of achievement of the SDGs, including access to justice, food security, gender equality, just and fair conditions of work, ending child labour, equal access to education, just transitions and climate justice. As is recognised in the New Agenda for Peace, the uneven suffering created by the effects of climate change ranks among the greatest injustices of this world. This suffering includes increased risks of all forms of trafficking in persons.

The heightened risks of trafficking in the context of climate change are rooted in existing and persistent inequalities, in poverty, in racism, and in discrimination. These heightened risks and vulnerability to exploitation are not inevitable or fixed, nor are they inherent in the human condition. They arise from policy failures, failures of political will and failures of international cooperation and solidarity. Recognizing these risks is essential to ensuring effective prevention of trafficking and to ensuring that the gender dimensions of such risks are recognised.

Gender inequality and systemic discrimination shapes the experiences of climate-related disasters, displacement and migration, and increases the negative impact of climate change. Such inequalities overlap with and reinforce existing experiences of discrimination, including on the grounds of disability, race and ethnicity, migration status, age, religion and poverty. Taking seriously the obligations concerning prevention of trafficking in persons requires systemic and urgent law and policy reforms, rooted in international human rights law, addressing climate change, environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity.”

Multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that may exacerbate gendered vulnerabilities to trafficking in the context of climate change. Climate-induced loss of livelihoods, income reduction or deterioration of working conditions in the agricultural sector have particular implications for rural women. Socioeconomic inequalities experienced by some women can be compounded as a result of intersecting dynamics such as discrimination, including on the grounds of race or ethnicity or migrant or disability status, worsening conditions for women living in poverty, women with disabilities, older women and girls.

While all children are exceptionally vulnerable to climate change, children with disabilities, migrant and refugee children, children living in poverty, children separated from their families and the youngest children are most at risk. Children may be particularly at risk as a result of climate-related displacement and disasters, owing to separation from families and communities and the breakdown of child protection services. Recognizing the urgent claims of climate justice and intergenerational equity, States must ensure the protection of the rights and best interests of all children, without discrimination, in particular in the context of climate-related migration and displacement, and planned relocation, and ensure the participation of children and young people in the design and implementation of prevention and protection measures on climate change, on climate-related disaster responses and on trafficking of children.

Law and policy measures to ensure mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence are essential to effective prevention of trafficking in persons in the context of climate change, and to the prevention of trafficking and of further negative climate impacts. Mandatory human rights due diligence laws can ensure that corporations address the human rights implications of climate change and trafficking in persons. Those sectors recognized as having a negative impact on climate change and causing environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity are also high-risk sectors where trafficking for the purposes of forced labour and other forms of exploitation frequently occur.

States must, individually and through international cooperation, protect against climate change-related human rights abuse by businesses, including those most associated with risks of trafficking. States should enact and enforce mandatory environmental and human rights due diligence obligations, regardless of the size of the company or employer, that require disclosure of harmful impacts identified in respect of the rights of workers, risks of forced labour and trafficking and environmental degradation, ensure that consultations are held with workers' representatives and affected communities, and require reporting on concrete and verifiable results achieved. States must ensure an enabling environment for trade unions and workers' organizations to support measures to combat climate change and ensure a just transition. Gender equality and women's empowerment must be ensured in all environmental and human rights due diligence measures.

Food insecurity and extreme poverty is at the root of increased risks of trafficking. Prevention of trafficking requires states to ensure protection of livelihoods and measures to combat environmental degradation, including by taking steps to transform systems of production and consumption in order to create a more sustainable relationship with nature.”

Climate change also contributes to increased risks of insecurity and to conflict, as communities compete for increasingly scarce resources and bear the burden of failures of international solidarity, international law and policymaking. The Secretary General's New Agenda for Peace calls for urgent action to address all forms of conflict. We must ensure that the gender dimensions of climate-related conflict and security risks are systematically addressed, including in peacebuilding and in peacekeeping transitions. In action plans, programmes and measures relating to women, peace and security, measures to prevent trafficking in persons for all

purposes of exploitation must be incorporated and the increased risks of trafficking arising in the context of climate change, displacement, disasters and conflict must be recognized.

States must cooperate to ensure an expansion of planned relocation opportunities, without discrimination and fully respecting human rights, ensuring the prevention of trafficking in persons in all actions to achieve realization of Sustainable Development Goal target 10.7. States, both individually and in cooperation, must adopt human rights-based migration policies to respond to the protection needs of persons displaced owing to climate change.

Prevention of trafficking in persons requires sustainable development, urgent climate action and peace, anchored in full respect for human rights — civil, political, economic, social and cultural.

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