



**UNHCR**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
Alliance against Trafficking in Persons  
Everyone has a Role: How to make a Difference Together  
Vienna, 23-24 April 2018**

**Opening Remarks by Vincent Cochetel  
Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean Route**

Chairperson,  
Distinguished Participants,

Thank you very much for the invitation today to share with you some observations. Let me start by taking this opportunity to reiterate our full support to the work of Special Representative Ambassador Jarbussynova and our commitment to pursue our partnership with the implementation of additional simulation exercises in the context of the project “Combating human trafficking along migration routes”.

I have chosen not to talk to you in detail today about what UNHCR does to protect victims of trafficking falling under its mandate. Looking at the Central Mediterranean Route, we must agree that this is often too late to protect victims of trafficking inside Libya. We cannot bring meaningful protection to victims of trafficking in Libya. So when you cannot bring protection to people where they are, you have to bring these persons to protection. IOM takes the majority of them back to their country of origin and I hope that programmes are in place to avoid their re-trafficking. Since November 2017, UNHCR has been evacuating some victims of trafficking who are refugees to Niger and Italy. Unfortunately, we may have to suspend this life-saving programme in June 2018, which is currently seriously under-funded and if more onward resettlement pledges from Niger are not operationalised in the coming months.

It is difficult to speak after my colleague from UNICEF who presented very well the prevention and response measures that need to be in place to protect children and other victims of trafficking. Many more eloquent speakers than me will share their experiences and expert advice in the next two days on this aspect. I will rather focus my observations today on what I am hearing time and time again from many politicians on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea: “We must defeat the business model of the traffickers.” The title of this 18<sup>th</sup> Conference is *Everyone has a Role: how to make a Difference Together*. My remarks today are mainly directed at States and relevant inter-governmental institutions. Please allow me to be frank and pragmatic, even if I run the risk of sounding undiplomatic.

For the sake of clarity, let me also note that for me that there are fewer distinctions between smugglers and traffickers as we near the borders of Libya as many incidents are known to involve a certain degree of coercion, violence and exploitation. Defeating the business model of traffickers requires in our views three types of action:

## 1. Disrupting the supply of materials to human traffickers

Today, as we speak, Chinese-made inflatable dinghies, marketed on the Internet as 'unsinkable refugee boats' are still exported to two OSCE Member States that allow private operators to organize their transit and export to Libya. These exports have been prohibited by the European Union in 2017. In reality, only around 5% of the containers going to Libya are inspected in one of these countries. No one is seeking accountability from these two countries to disclose who the importers, transit agents and the final consignees of this cargo have been since 2012. These rubber dinghies have contributed to more deaths of people departing from Libya than the sporadic clashes in that country since 2012.

- *Can you do something to stop the on-line retailer that keeps advertising this merchandise that contributes to deaths?*
- *Can you collectively ask these two countries to disclose those involved in these sales and exports?*

## 2. Disrupting the supply of revenues to human traffickers

In some OSCE countries, human traffickers are forcing vulnerable migrants and refugees into prostitution and labour exploitation schemes.

Let me give you an example. Recently, I followed a minibus in an OSCE country. Every kilometre along a busy road, the driver was dropping young women (maybe girls) from Nigeria and Cameroon. These women had to wait for hours for their multiple clients to have sexual intercourse in the nearby vineyards. I was told that this is legal, as prostitution is legal in that country. How can we know whether it is legal? Who speaks to these women to determine whether this is legal?

- *Are you ready to see the link between this form of exploitation and cross-Mediterranean human trafficking? Or should we continue to ignore the reality and pretend that human trafficking is not taking place on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea?*
- *Are you ready to follow the money flows resulting from this exploitation? Are we ready to collect testimonies and protect witnesses?*

An 80% reduction in sea crossings along the Central Mediterranean Route this year means that human traffickers must find alternative ways to monetize their investment. We already know from our social media monitoring work that prices for ransoms are increasing and that victims are often subjected to several consecutive ransom requests by different actors. Many of the financial transactions are no longer made through the paperless *hawala* system, but through bank transfers outside of Libya.

- *Are you committed to really follow the money as if it was related to drugs, terrorism or weapons?*

Human traffickers in Libya are not just involved in transporting their victims. They organize the 'chain of custody' in horrific conditions. They subject victims to forced labour, selling them, renting them or leasing them to unscrupulous individuals. Women and many young men are also subjected to forced prostitution in addition to the numerous abuses they suffer in captivity. Over time, human traffickers and the militias assisting them or/and protecting them have diversified their portfolios including trading weapons, drugs, medicines, and smuggled oil, depriving Libya and its people of badly needed resources. This oil smuggling business estimated at \$750 million per year is prohibited by UN Security Council resolution 2362 (2017)

in June 2017. The mandate of the EUNAVFOR Med naval force was amended in July 2017 to include conducting surveillance and gathering information on the illegal trafficking of oil exports from Libya. Unfortunately, many boats registered in OSCE Member States and in some Mediterranean partner countries are involved in this form of illegal trade which provides considerable revenue to militias either directly involved in trafficking or that protect traffickers thus reinforcing their power to the detriment of the internationally-recognized Government of National Accord.

- *Can you take measures to stop this oil smuggling, knowing who benefits from it?*
- *We have seen in the past more resolute action to fight piracy in the Horn of Africa. Likewise, why is seizing boats, prosecuting the shipping companies and insurance companies involved in the oil smuggling trade from Libya not possible?*

### **3. Ending Impunity**

While we have seen some progress in prosecuting human traffickers in some Mediterranean countries, in particular in Spain and Italy, a lot remains to be done. My message to States' representatives today is that maybe we need to speak a bit less about defeating the business model of the human traffickers but do more about it and start putting an end to the cycle of impunity in some countries.

Feelings of powerlessness must be resisted. Recently the Attorney-General of Libya issued 205 warrants of arrest against human traffickers which included officials involved in immigration detention, coast guards, and staff from various embassies. This is a good start and even if these warrants did not lead to arrests and even if many traffickers are currently out of reach, everyone has a role to play.

- *Can you impose travel bans on these criminals?*
- *Can you freeze their assets on your territory?*
- *Can you identify their victims, protect these witnesses, and initiate more prosecutions?*
- *Can you share more effectively and rapidly information among yourselves and stop arguing endlessly that inadequate data-sharing protocols prevent you from combatting trafficking along this route?*
- *Can you stop playing politics at the UN Sanctions Committee and ensure that a larger number of these individuals and companies get named and listed for sanctions purposes?*
- *How can the OSCE & other institutions can be more effectively used to undertake the above proposed actions?*

Improved transnational police and judicial cooperation is a must and *everyone has role to play* to make it easier to fight impunity.

Then, and only then, will we start disrupting the business model of human traffickers along the Central Mediterranean Route.

Thank you for your attention.