

Human Trafficking at the Crossroads

Private-Public Partnership to Fight Human Trafficking

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Closing Address

by

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President of the United Nations General Assembly

Your Royal Highness Sheikha Sabeeka, my respect to You and to your husband, His Majesty, the King of Bahrain,
Your Excellency Suzanne Mubarak,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Representatives of Civil Society and the Business Community,
Representatives of the Media and the World of Art,
United Nations Colleagues,
Sisters and Brothers All,

Let us all, with a sense of humility and reverence, start by remembering that we are in the presence of God, the Almighty and Merciful, Father of us all. The One we have greatly offended by allowing Human Trafficking to exist.

I am honoured to join you all at the end of this extraordinary gathering to push further a worldwide movement against the crimes of human trafficking. Your presence here in the lovely and hospitable city of Manama demonstrates the breadth of the global coalition that is forming to combat one of the darkest phenomena that accompany the relentless process of globalization that defines our time. It is to the enormous credit of Her Royal Highness Queen Sabeeka that such a diverse and clearly dedicated group of concerned world citizens have come together to mobilize the worlds of business, media, theatre and cinema to raise awareness on this issue.

We are grateful to You, Royal Highness, for promoting these partnerships and this noble cause. In doing so, you are following in the tradition of the Prophet Mohammed who, centuries ago said in a Hadith, "Whatsoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart—and that is the weakest of faith." Slavery, whether in its ancient or modern forms, is not only shameful, it is downright sinful, and it has no place in our world. We must summon the strongest of faith to bring about the desired change in our world and to end this evil.

Although God certainly knows and blesses the work of Sheikha Sabeeka, it is unlikely that the hundreds of thousands of women and children and men who fall victim to this modern-day slave trade each year will ever know of her solidarity with them. They are nameless victims who inhabit the darkest corners of our societies. We are organizing to put an end to their anonymity; and we are organizing to end the anonymity and the impunity of their tormentors. Today, for a brief moment, let us celebrate the woman who is taking a lead in this campaign against darkness. Your Highness, Sheikha Sabeeka, we salute you.

We know the clandestine nature of human trafficking. How do we make people aware? How do we dismantle the networks that prey on the innocent and the marginalized, on the young and the vulnerable? I want to thank those celebrities among you whose names are instantly recognized by millions of admirers around the world and who have chosen to use this brilliance to shed light on this evil trade. We celebrate your commitment to the global campaigns that promise to return to the victims their names, their identities and their rightful place in society. You will also shed light on the corruption and moral bankruptcy that allows these traffickers and their customers to flourish, most often with impunity.

The campaign against human trafficking has a long history. One of my personal heroes is Reverend William Lloyd Garrison, whose fiery writings in *The Liberator* inspired the anti-slavery movement in the US in the years before the American Civil War. A founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society, he was one of the most articulate, and most radical, opponents of slavery. His approach to emancipation stressed active and creative non-violence as the adequate means to resist this evil. While some other abolitionists of the time favoured gradual emancipation, Garrison argued for "immediate and complete emancipation of all slaves". He wrote that "I have faithfully tried in the face of the fiercest opposition, and under the most depressing circumstances, to make your cause my cause, my wife and children your wives and children, subjected to the same outrage and degradation; myself on the same auction block, to be sold to the highest bidder." Garrison was a true man of God.

Unfortunately, Garrison's passion and his Anti-Slavery Society are still needed today. There should be no place for slavery, for the buying and selling of human beings, in the 21st century. However, it does in fact exist and has today become an industry which ranks as the world's third most profitable crime, after drugs and arms trafficking.

In recent months we have witnessed the breakdown of our global economy as thousands of enterprises fall in bankruptcy. This economic bankruptcy is closely paralleled, I believe, with a widespread moral bankruptcy as well. Our very systems allow for human trafficking to persist. Indeed, many justice systems belittle the seriousness of this crime. Last month the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, one of the lead agencies in combating trafficking and slavery, reported that two out of every five countries covered in its Global Trafficking Report had not recorded a single conviction of traffickers. I fear the problem will become exacerbated by the deepening economic crisis which could increase both the supply of vulnerable potential victims and the demand for cheap labour.

As President of the General Assembly, I am proud of the efforts by the United Nations community of nations to ratify and implement the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Human Trafficking, especially of Women and Children. We have created a body of international law, including the establishment of Special Rapporteurs, mandated to fight trafficking. We are with media and the private sector to foster global partnerships against trafficking in persons and other contemporary forms of slavery. But we can and must do more.

Last December, the General Assembly adopted a resolution that demands better coordination of efforts against human trafficking and the protection of victims. Now we – including the friends that have come together here in Bahrain – must work to give this legislation life. The GA resolution specifically calls on Governments, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to improve their efforts and join together in backing the international initiative to combat trafficking.

For these reasons, I support calls for a UN General Assembly Global Plan of Action to prevent human trafficking, prosecute traffickers, and protect and assist the victims. At the specific request of the African Union, I am pleased to work with the 192 Member States of the General Assembly to develop an aggressive Plan of Action that will help all stakeholders to pool our resources and our determination to end

these abuses. We have international treaties, a Protocol, and numerous Resolution and Declarations that commit our countries: yet we are still lacking a blueprint for global action on the ground, one that brings together the punitive and restorative measures, and joins the development, justice and security dimensions into a common endeavour; hence the importance of a General Assembly Plan of Action, covering all these important dimensions.

Although the General Assembly has pledged its commitment to fighting this crime in several important resolutions, change—real, credible and sustained change—takes more than simple political will. It is time to tap into the reserves of moral courage that lay within each of us as individuals and of all of us as nations to carry out the changes needed to ensure freedom for all men and women. If we do so, our hearts and our capacity to love and serve will grow. The partnerships that were cultivated and energized here in Bahrain will be in the forefront of this campaign. I thank you all for helping in this noble endeavour.

I thank you for being part of it.