

Human Trafficking at the Crossroads

Private-Public Partnership to Fight Human Trafficking

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Keynote Address

by

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"A way forward"

Your Highness Shaikha Sabeeka,
Dr. Costa,
Mr. Arkless,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here today, and see so many partners, so many experts and activists – ready, willing and most of all determined to take action against the global challenge of Human Trafficking.

Let me begin by extending my deep appreciation to the Kingdom of Bahrain for hosting this important gathering, for giving our International Peace Movement an invaluable opportunity to make a positive impact.

I would like to address my special thanks to Your Highness Shaikha Sabeeka, for the steadfast commitment, generosity and cooperation you've shown throughout our Movement's activities.

- Your Highness's efforts for peace and development have been constant and unwavering.
- Your courage continues to inspire and empower women across our region and beyond.

With your strong support our Movement's combat against human trafficking began in 2004, as a response to a strong call for action echoed by over 700 participants attending our Women Defending Peace Conference.

Women, men, and young people who realize that that our nations will never achieve long-lasting peace and human security as long as so many people, so many children, continue to be entrapped in a vicious cycle of exploitation and abuse.

In consultation with our partners – and they were many – UNODC, ILO, Vital Voices, IOM, DCAF, to mention but a few, we reviewed the work presently underway by governments, intergovernmental, non-governmental organizations and civil society at large.

Many of these activities focused on three areas of vital importance to human trafficking: prevention, protection and prosecution. A missing link was identified – the absence of the prominent role of the private sector. This was the area of focus our Movement agreed to work on.

Why the business community?

While the primary obligation to prevent and combat human trafficking lies on national governments, we believe that the business community can make an immense difference by assuming a leadership role in supporting innovation in labour policies, supply chain management and corporate social responsibility initiatives.

By shouldering its share of responsibility, transforming the dynamics of the profession, adopting a zero tolerance approach to trafficking in the policies of their enterprises, the business community can sever the demand-supply chain of this soaring criminal practice and regain the much needed confidence and trust of the wide public.

As I stand here today, I recognize many of the pioneers from our Movement, the business community and representatives from relevant UN organizations and NGOs, who met barely two years ago in Athens. It was then that the campaign "End Human Trafficking Now!" was launched, and formulated and endorsed the Athens Ethical Principles, which has been our guide for action.

Today the "End Human Trafficking Now!" logo has become the umbrella that embraces activities of business leaders worldwide.

This pioneering group has been committed to taking this long journey from Athens to Geneva, to Davos, to Egypt, to Hong Kong, to Vienna and now to Manama.

- With every journey that we shared, we gathered more and more partners dedicated to our cause.
- With every step taken, we collectively contributed to re-enforcing actions that are saving the lives of millions of people.

Still, there is much more that needs to be done. And, I welcome the chance to stimulate the campaign's action plan through our discussion and the outcomes that will emanate from this conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we are at critical crossroads in our struggle to end human trafficking.

International bodies have repeatedly warned us that we face a knowledge crisis in regard to this challenge; that we have yet to discover the real depth, breadth and scope of the phenomenon.

In fact, while sexual exploitation has become the most documented type of trafficking in aggregate statistics, other forms of exploitation, such as forced or bonded labour, domestic servitude and other criminal activities continue to be seriously under-reported.

In order to move forward, we must broaden our understanding of existing gaps especially in the availability of information, the coordination of our resources and the implementation of our programs.

We need to energize our discourses with new ideas, and adapt our international, regional and national policies on human trafficking to meet the realities of our times. For, as we all know, we live in an era of profound social and economic insecurity – from food to financial crises, armed conflicts to environmental degradation, extreme poverty to disease epidemics.

Fuelled by this spiral of challenges, the phenomenon of human trafficking keeps growing in severity and magnitude, breaking the spirit and burning the lives of all those that it touches.

We all realise that in times of economic depression, when jobs are shed and businesses are compromised, far-reaching criminal networks that survive on greed and irresponsibility flourish.

As new realities emerge, as the nature of human trafficking itself keeps evolving, and as the perpetrators of this crime become savvier, the problem promises to become more complex and increasingly difficult to tackle.

In UNODC's recent global report we have just learnt that women account for more than 60% of traffickers in certain regions. This is truly alarming and points to a vicious cycle that needs to be addressed. Most of these women are victims of trafficking themselves and the result of an incomplete strategy on victim protection and reintegration.

Accordingly, we need to develop stronger regional alliances, national action plans and policy objectives framed through a rights perspective and a better understanding of the root causes of the challenge.

In Egypt, we have embraced the broadest definition of trafficking adopted by international instruments. Through our National Committee on Trafficking in Persons, we are working extremely hard to tackle the different dimensions of the problem: developing protective structures, re-enforcing our legal system, and enhancing community outreach and education.

Our mandate includes developing measures to assist and protect victims of trafficking, increase media awareness, build capacity of criminal justice officials and prepare a central database on the phenomenon of trafficking in Egypt. We are also working in close collaboration with international organizations such as UNODC and IOM, with whom an Arabic manual focusing on the protection of victims was recently launched in Cairo.

An integral part of our efforts continue to focus on addressing the root causes of trafficking on supporting and protecting vulnerable groups, especially women and children, giving them the power and incentives to avoid all forms of exploitation that might lead to trafficking, from poverty alleviation, to removing discriminatory practices and changing mindsets to name but a few.

In Egypt, we continue to invest in education for girls, in micro-credit schemes for women and youth in an effort to reduce the demand of cheap labour and services in female designated sectors of work.

These measures are an integral part of our national development policy. It is about the fulfilment of human needs. It entails enhancing the quality of life: better housing, safe water, health services and educational opportunities. It means giving our people the tools that will enable them to take their lives in their own hands!

Our Parliament has recently adopted comprehensive and visionary legislation safeguarding the human rights of vulnerable children.

Our revised Child Law now fully criminalizes specific violations against children's rights, including FGM, the worst forms of child labour, the commercial and sexual exploitation of children, child pornography, the sale of children; or their organs. It also provides a comprehensive strategy for the prevention of child exclusion and marginalization. This is a model law which we have made available for you.

These developments, at the heart of our legal system, reflect our deep conviction that child trafficking is not a sub-issue of trafficking in human beings but rather a specific child rights issue.

During this conference, you will gain further insight about our numerous efforts from our expert teams. Although, we are greatly encouraged by these positive developments, it is certain that we still have a very long way before we achieve the sustainable solutions we aspire for.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The challenge before all of us is monumental. Human Trafficking is a booming illicit trade, with no boundaries, no moral or ethical limits.

But, despite this daunting picture, regardless of all the obstacles we are facing, progress has been achieved.

Since our International Women's Peace Movement met in Athens two years ago, laws have been passed in this region and beyond; shelters have been created; help lines put into place; training programmes developed and private-public partnerships established to protect victims of human trafficking.

The United Nations family has dramatically accelerated its efforts in:

- The implementation of the UN Protocol against trafficking in persons
- The protection of women and children from violence, abuse and exploitation.
- Challenges of forced labour, child labour and migrant workers.

As Special Envoy to the "End Human Trafficking Now!" campaign, Mr Arkless, will tell you, many business leaders and associations have also been very active in this field, using business innovations to disrupt trafficking routes, disseminating codes of conduct and awareness manuals which address human rights and human trafficking issues directly.

We have been greatly inspired by many of our partners who have vowed to clear out human trafficking from the whole supply-chain of their companies, to raise awareness about this repulsive practice amongst their employees, and their own partners.

Let us not forget all those who have invested in corporate social responsibility initiatives that address the root causes of trafficking, enhancing the quality and availability of essential social services, uplifting communities from poverty through job creation and skill formation.

These are impressive results, and I am certain we can build on many of these accomplishments.

The contributions of NGOs and other civil society groups must also be highly commended. They have especially played a key role in protecting victims and raising global awareness, trying to transform public consciousness.

Determined to break the walls of silence, our own Movement has been working hard to stimulate dialogues between multiple-stakeholders, sharing available statistics, best practices and effective grassroots approaches. We have even developed a Cyber Peace Initiative (CPI) to inspire, empower and engage people internationally to utilise the infinite power of ICTs in fostering safer and more secure societies.

An integral part of CPI is devoted to the topic of internet safety. We strive to increase children's media literacy, while protecting them from the myriad of dangers present on the net. We work to foster a culture of shared responsibility between diverse stakeholders – uniting our efforts and building capacities. Parents, youth, governments, the private sector, the IT sector, law enforcement officers, the judiciary, the media – uniting our efforts and building capacity to protect children from all forms of exploitation and abuse.

In fact, only last week, we organised a seminar entitled "Crossing Borders to Protect the Children of the World" in Egypt on the occasion of the Honorary Board Meeting of the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC).

As a mother, as a grandmother, it was extremely disturbing to be confronted with the realities of the sordid world of child exploitation, the destructive acts of violence committed on the most defenseless of our citizens through the use of new technologies. I am sure we all share the same concern.

I kept asking myself, how is this possible? How can we allow innocent children to be abused in this way? What kind of future are we building?

Through our Cairo Declaration, we sent a strong call for action, urging global leaders, networks and organisations to develop new tools, technologies, build greater awareness and stimulate concerted action to ensure the safety and human security of all children.

We called for the enactment of improved legislation and the enforcement of existing laws with a view to preventing exploitation of children in all its forms. We recommitted ourselves to the protection of children, who are the future of our shared world – the protection of those that cannot protect themselves.

Today, I urge all of you here present to take similar action against human trafficking. We must make sure that women and children are no longer used as commodities, as weapons of greed and violence. That they are no longer forced to chose between their dignity and security, between their daily survival and their future livelihood.

We must remember that we are all in this together. It will be your vision that will enable us to identify and agree on the next generation of steps, bringing us closer to achieving our goals.

As concerned citizens, we need to set the tone for our societies, and send a powerful message that the exploitation of the most vulnerable should not and will not be tolerated!

Thank you.