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Statement – International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

2 December 2024

On the International Day for Abolition of Slavery, we recognize the strength of survivors and commend the bravery of human rights defenders and others striving to eliminate it.

Let us draw inspiration from their resilience to build a world where contemporary forms of slavery are not only abolished in law but also eradicated in practice.

Over the last 90 years, numerous international instruments addressing prohibition of contemporary forms of slavery including traditional and descent based slavery, debt bondage, serfdom, forced labour, worst forms of child labour, sexual slavery, forced and early marriages, the sale of wives and inherited widows, sale and commercial sexual exploitation of children and children in armed conflict, predatory recruitment into fighting, and the exploitation of the prostitution of others, have been signed and ratified. They also address the above acts perpetrated by armed groups and terrorist organisations. The prohibition of slavery in international law rises to the level of *jus cogens*, placing full obligation on all States to protect their people from slavery and to eradicate slavery in all of its forms, without any possibility of derogation. Contemporary forms of slavery violate the fundamental rights and dignity that every human being is entitled to. Despite significant progress, over 50 million people are estimated to live in conditions of contemporary forms of slavery today due to reasons such as the outbreak or continuation of tragic armed conflicts, natural disasters, climate change, pollution and environmental degradation, unprecedented disruptions to employment and education, discrimination, extreme poverty, forced and unsafe migration, unchallenged social norms that are justified using "culture", as well as a rise in sexual and gender-based violence. It continues to relate to multiple related human rights violations such as violation of the right to family life or to health, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, or enforced disappearance, and disproportionately affect women and girls worldwide, with millions trapped in exploitative circumstances. They are often made vulnerable due to sex and gender-based discrimination and cumulative and overlapping factors including, poverty, and lack of access to education or economic opportunities. Addressing this crisis requires urgent global action, including stricter regulations, preventive efforts, effective implementation of existing norms, education initiatives, and gender responsive, survivor led support programs to dismantle the systems that perpetuate exploitation.

Racially and ethnically marginalized groups, migrants and those in situations of climate-induced human mobility, displaced persons, those belonging to minority groups, Indigenous Peoples, peasants, persons targeted on grounds of their religion or belief, persons with disabilities, persons of diverse sexual orientations and/or gender identities, children, and younger or older women and girls as well as younger or older men and boys, are among the most vulnerable to contemporary forms of slavery, with factors such as intersecting forms of discrimination and social exclusion creating conditions ripe for exploitation. Especially, incarcerated individuals face a lack of meaningful work opportunities, insufficient wages, and poor working conditions, including long hours without breaks or rest days, and limited access to occupational health and safety protection. A large number of formerly incarcerated people also endure discrimination and stigmatization, restricting their access to education, decent work, housing, and public services, and increasing their vulnerability to recidivism and exploitation in contemporary forms of slavery. Combating contemporary forms of slavery within these populations demands targeted interventions, including during transitional justice processes that address systemic

inequality, enhance legal protections, ensure adequate and urgent climate action, and provide pathways to justice and economic security.

Workers' organizations play a critical role in preventing and addressing contemporary forms of slavery. Operating at both local and national levels, these organizations promote access to decent work, advocate for gender equality and non-discrimination, and secure access to justice and remedies for survivors, and safeguard the overall well-being of workers and their families. With the alarming increase in contemporary forms of slavery across the world, the importance of these organizations has become even more pronounced. Their efforts are crucial as they continue to confront the evolving challenges of forced labour, forced marriage, human trafficking, and other forms of exploitation, ensuring the dignity and rights of workers are upheld.

Businesses also have a pivotal role in preventing and addressing contemporary forms of slavery by ensuring their activities and supply chains are free from exploitative practices. This begins with implementing robust human rights due diligence processes to ensure compliance with labour standards, including by implementing transparent sourcing policies, conducting regular audits, taking accountability for abuses committed, and engaging with suppliers to identify and mitigate risks of forced labour and trafficking. Training employees and engaging meaningfully with workers' organizations and human rights defenders to recognize and address potential instances of contemporary forms of slavery is equally crucial.

The roots of contemporary forms of slavery are complex, and its antecedents can be traced back to the historical trafficking in African people. Today it is intertwined with poverty, inequality, lack of development, conflict, environmental degradation, extractivism and unsustainable development, racism and discrimination. To address these challenges, we must intensify our collective efforts, focusing on strengthening legal frameworks and enforcement, prosecuting perpetrators and dismantling systems that allow exploitation to persist, providing redress and empowering survivors through rehabilitation, education, access to justice, and opportunities for a dignified life, and promoting equitable development to tackle the systemic injustices that leave individuals vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Awareness-raising is crucial for shining a light on hidden forms of slavery, often obscured in supply chains, migration routes, and informal economies, combating underreporting and fear of intimidation and reprisals. The UN Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery which was established more than 30 years ago, helps every year more than 10 000 victims of slavery worldwide to receive essential services and supports civil society to combat and address these practices. It is imperative that Member States and businesses contribute to the Fund to strengthen the global anti-slavery movement. We urge all Member States to ratify and implement existing instruments in this area, report to relevant monitoring mechanisms and implement their obligations to abolish and eradicate slavery in all its manifestations.

Today we come together as a global community to reaffirm our commitment to eradicating all forms of contemporary forms of slavery. This solemn occasion reminds us of the millions of men, women, and children worldwide who remain trapped in conditions of exploitation, forced labour, human trafficking, and servitude. Freedom is not a privilege—it is a universal human right. The member states, civil society, the private sector, the international community and individuals must work together to end slavery in all its forms and ensure that freedom is a reality for everyone, everywhere. Together, we can create a world where dignity, equality, and justice prevail.

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The International Day for the Abolition of Slavery marks the date of the adoption, by the General Assembly, of the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (resolution 317(IV) of 2 December 1949). Today, the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery recalls the date of the adoption of this first Convention to fight human trafficking by the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Tomoya Obokata, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; Mr. Nicolas Levrat, Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues; Ms. Paula Gaviria Betancur, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; Ms Astrid Puentes Riaño, Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; Ms. Mai Saito, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; Nazila Ghanea, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; Suamhirs Piraino-Guzman, Susan Coppedge, Hina Jilani, Ecaterina Schilling and Fatimata M'Baye members of the Board of Trustees of the UN Voluntary Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery; Mr. Ben Saul, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Ms. Mama Fatima Singhateh, Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children; Laura Nyirinkindi (Chair), Claudia Flores (Vice-Chair), Dorothy Estrada Tanck, Ivana Krstić, and Haina Lu, Working group on discrimination against women and girls; Ms. Siobhán Mullally, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; Ms. Gina Romero, Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association; Ms. Fernanda Hopenhaym (Chairperson), Ms. Lyra Jakulevičienė (Vice-chairperson), Mr. Robert McCorquodale, Mr. Damilola Olawuyi and Ms. Pichamon Yeophantong, Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises; Reem Alsalem, Reem Alsalem, Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Elisa Morgera, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change; George Katrougalos, Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order; Farida Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on the right to education; Ms. Ashwini K.P., Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; Ana Peláez Narváez, Chair of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; Heba Hagrass, Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities; Mr. Yao Agbetse, Independent Expert on the Central African Republic; Barbara G. Reynolds (Chair), Bina D'Costa, Catherine Namakula, Isabelle Mamadou, Miriam Ekiudoko, Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent; Morris Tidball-Binz, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Mr. Gehad Madi, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants; Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal, Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing; Thomas Andrews, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar; Surya Deva, Special Rapporteur on the right to development; Mr. Matthew Gillett (Chair-Rapporteur), Ms. Priya Gopalan (Vice-Chair on Follow-Up), Ms. Miriam Estrada Castillo, and Mr. Mumba Malila, Working Group on arbitrary detention; Mr. Juan Pablo Albán Alencastro (Rapporteur), Mr. Mohammed Ayat, Mr. Matar Diop (Vice Chair), Mr. Olivier de Frouville (Chair), Ms. Suela Janina, Mr. Fidelis Kanyongolo, Ms. Milica Kolakovic-Bojovic (Vice Chair), Ms. Barbara Lochbihler, Mr. Horacio Ravenna (Vice Chair), and Ms. Carmen Rosa Villa Quintana, of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances; Ms. Jovana Jezdimirovic Ranito, Mr. Ravindran Daniel, Ms. Michelle Small, Ms. Joana de Deus Pereira, and Mr. Andres Macias Tolosa, Working Group on the use of

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***mercenaries*; Alexandra Xanthaki, *Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights*; Michal Balcerzak, chair of the *UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*; Cecilia M Bailliet, *Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity*; Ms. Ann Skelton, Chair of the *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child*; Michael Fakhri, *Special Rapporteur on the right to food*.**