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COMMITTEE ON HEMISPHERIC SECURITY Original: English

Working Group to Address Trafficking

in Persons (2022-2023)

CONCEPT NOTE

SEVENTH MEETING OF NATIONAL AUTHORITIES ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

(Presented by the Chair)

1. ABOUT THE OAS NATIONAL AUTHORITIES MEETING ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

The OAS National Authorities Meeting on Trafficking in Persons (“TIP meeting”, hereafter) is the main political forum in the Western Hemisphere to discuss public policies and practices to respond to all types of exploitation related to trafficking in persons.

The 7th TIP meeting is chaired by the United States of America. It follows previous ones that were chaired by Argentina (2021), Mexico (2018), Brazil (2014), Guatemala (2012), Argentina (2009), and Venezuela (2006).

At this 7th TIP meeting, OAS member states will discuss shared concerns and priorities on the prevention and prosecution of trafficking in persons and the protection of victims and survivors. There will also be space to discuss initiating the implementation of the Third Work Plan for a Comprehensive Response to Trafficking in Persons in the Western Hemisphere (2023-2028), hereinafter referred to as the “Third Work Plan on Trafficking in Persons” and the adoption of recommendations from the Third Work Plan that will be prioritized regionally in response to human trafficking.

1. OBJECTIVES

* Facilitate OAS member states cooperation to address new challenges and trends in trafficking in persons at sub-regional and regional levels;
* Promote and provide a space for dialogue and information sharing among OAS member states on their efforts to respond to trafficking in persons in a post-pandemic context;
* Discuss the implementation of the Third Work Plan on Trafficking in Persons;
* Debate regional priorities to prevent and reduce trafficking in persons.

1. TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS IN A POST-PANDEMIC CONTEXT

The 7th TIP meeting will be the first time that national authorities on trafficking in persons meet after the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be an opportunity to discuss changes and trends emerging from this period. OAS member states will be given the floor to share their responses to the crime of trafficking in persons and the actions taken to alleviate the impact of the pandemic specially within the most at-risk populations. Trends and concerns will also be addressed during the meeting. Some of the topics expected to be discussed are:

1. The use of technology to recruit and exploit victims and to prevent trafficking in persons:

Technology influences the crime of trafficking in persons, presenting challenges and opportunities. Restrictive measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic led to the rise of Internet use in work and school activities, as well as in social engagement. Information and communications technology have become a necessary element in peoples’ lives. The use of social media with publicly accessible information about a person, their family, friends, geolocation, and interests facilitated the operation of traffickers, who intensified remote identification and recruitment of individuals on a larger scale compared to offline schemes.

Traffickers recruit victims in different countries simultaneously, using fake identities or even anonymously. Dating apps and online gaming platforms are often used to recruit victims of sexual exploitation. Fake websites or announcements on legitimate employment portals are created by traffickers to attract victims aiming at exploitation.

Despite the increasing misuse of technology by perpetrators, technology can also be used to prevent trafficking in persons, detect victims, and support investigations and prosecutions. The use of technology may potentialize practical challenges faced by authorities, such as limited binational and international cooperation to conduct investigations and collect liable and secure evidence to counter this crime. Practitioners may also find obstacles in the lack of regulations and practices to be put in place by technology companies to detect trafficking in persons activities online and remove its content avoiding new recruitment or re-victimization.

On the other hand, the coronavirus pandemic accelerated governments’ initiatives to continue responding to human trafficking. Some examples are the facilitation of continuous multi-sectorial training, the implementation of online support services to victims, and E-Justice mechanisms, such as online trials and pre-trials.

The post-pandemic period has enlightened the need to generate solid national, sub-national, regional, and international cooperation mechanisms to more efficiently use technology resources to counter the crime of trafficking in persons and to protect victims and survivors, ensuring their privacy and human rights.

1. The impacts of climate change on vulnerability to trafficking in persons:

Climate change can exacerbate vulnerabilities to human trafficking, especially among the most underserved and marginalized populations. Environmental changes can lead to economic adversities, increase of irregular migration flows, unemployment, forced labor and exploitation, food shortage, creating greater risks for human trafficking as individuals aim to escape from those contexts.

Environmentally harmful and exploitative activity often takes place in remote parts of countries where the presence of the state is limited. It usually affects marginalized populations who often depend on natural resources to live.

Some of the industries that promote environmental degradation are the same that leave people more vulnerable to exploitation. Fisheries, extractive and agriculture, companies, for example, contribute to the emissions and damage of the land that drive climate change while exploiting the labor of the most vulnerable people.

The capacities of the state to monitor those remote areas may be limited in many cases. Weaker protection mechanisms may lead to consequences and harms for both: the environment and individuals, who are more exposed to labor exploitation. In places where labor demand is not filled locally, recruiters rely on the work force brought from other places. So, individuals and/or groups of individuals are more at-risk of being recruited at domestic and international levels under false promises of work.

Communities living in areas affected by climate-induced disasters, extreme weather events, environmental degradation and scarcity of natural resources are more at-risk of migrating domestically or internationally, especially, seeking for economic stability. Those areas may generate urgent demands for labor aiming at reconstruction efforts. It may also stimulate the migration of people to other areas where the environmental activities are more stable. In both scenarios, due to their vulnerabilities, workers may be found working in degrading conditions, forced to work, set into debt bondages and other forms of exploitation.

1. Money laundering as a vector of human trafficking

Human trafficking has become one of the most lucrative forms of transnational organized crime in the world, generating approximately $150 billion in profits, according to the 2020 report from the International Labor Organization. As human traffickers seek to introduce their illicit gains into the legitimate financial system, they resort to money laundering techniques to disguise the illicit source of their funds.

This presents governments with both a challenge and an opportunity. The sophisticated and adaptive methods used to launder illicit profits can be difficult to detect, requiring governments to develop specialized legal and regulatory compliance frameworks, robust financial intelligence and analysis capabilities, and effective public/private partnerships.

However, as governments improve their ability to “follow the money,” they gain a very effective tool to combat human trafficking, by detecting and disrupting the illicit financial flows derived from this criminal activity.

Furthermore, having the legal and regulatory frameworks that allow for the seizure and forfeiture of the illicit gains of human trafficking is an effective way to deny the use of those funds to finance the perpetration of more crime, as well as provide governments with additional financial means to administer services and restitution to victims.

Combating money laundering is an important element of an integral approach to combating trafficking in persons. The sharing of experiences and good practices in this constantly evolving landscape will increase member states’ capacity to effectively address the multidimensional challenges posed by human trafficking.

1. Links of human trafficking with other modalities of Transnational Organized Crime (TOC)

Transnational organized criminal groups and networks are highly adaptive and have been known to diversify their criminal activities to maximize illicit profits. Given the highly lucrative nature of human trafficking, the profit motive for established organized criminal groups to become involved is high. The groups and networks can be simultaneously engaged in several criminal activities, including drug trafficking, firearms trafficking, illegal mining, contraband, money laundering, cybercrime, and the corruption of government officials.

Not only can TOC groups be involved in several criminal enterprises, but they also force their human trafficking victims to engage in criminal activities on their behalf, thereby reducing their own risk of arrest. These crimes can include minor property crime, drug dealing, bulk cash smuggling, pornography, prostitution, and even recruitment of other victims of trafficking.

Organized criminal groups benefit from creating a flood of criminality to maximize profits while straining the capacity of law enforcement, especially if there are existing vulnerabilities or crisis situations, such as poverty, social unrest, or the COVID-19 pandemic.

To successfully respond to the challenges presented by these complex crimes, it is important for governments to have effective strategies, good practices, and skilled investigators and prosecutors. It is also important that member states promote and sustain international cooperation that is responsive and timely, formal and informal.

1. SURVIVORS INSIGHTS TO THE MEETING

This meeting will encourage the participation of survivors to bring their perspectives and insights to the implementation of the Third Work Plan on Trafficking in Persons (2023-2028). In addition, an online regional consultation will be opened for the participation of survivors and civil society organizations working on trafficking in persons. A report on the consultation’s main findings will be delivered during the 7th TIP meeting,

1. MEETING FORMAT

* The meeting will be held in the OAS Headquarters in Washington-DC on **February 5th and 6th 2024**. It will be conducted in person and webcast through the OAS social media to all audiences.
* All presentations and remarks will be conducted in person only.
* The meeting will be divided in the following moments:
  + 1. Registration of participants
    2. Opening ceremony
    3. Election of authorities
    4. Introductory session
    5. Adoption of the Third Work Plan on Trafficking in Persons
    6. Plenary Sessions
    7. Approval of the recommendations of the Seventh Meeting of National Authorities on Trafficking in Persons
    8. Election of the Chair of the Eight Meeting of National Authorities on Trafficking in Persons
    9. Closing ceremony
  + Member states shall limit their remarks to 2 minutes (in-person only).
  + The use of slide presentations is not permitted.
  + Member states are encouraged to address their 2-minute remarks related to the specific topic of each session. General reports on policies and activities should be addressed in the “Introductory session”.

1. PARTICIPATION

* The floor will be open to in-person participation only.
* National authorities who cannot participate in the meeting in person are welcome to designate a delegate who shall act in their representation in person.
* Member states are requested to accredit their delegation for in-person participation, in writing, to Gloria Uribe of the Department of Conferences and Meetings Management, ([guribe@oas.org](mailto:guribe@oas.org)), with a copy to Anna Uchoa of the Department of Public Security, ([auchoa@oas.org](mailto:auchoa@oas.org)) and Michael Bejos of the Department against Transnational Organized Crime ([mbejos@oas.org](mailto:mbejos@oas.org)); and Jose Gabriel Salazar Guerrero of the Secretariat of the Permanent Council and subsidiaries organs ([jgsalazar@oas.org](mailto:jgsalazar@oas.org)).
* Member states are encouraged to include at least one survivor of trafficking in persons in their delegation.
* The accreditation of delegations should be preferably sent by January 26th, 2024.
* Member states seeking assistance with travel and lodging for their National Authority’s participation are invited to inform the Technical Secretariat no later than October 27th, 2023.

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