

Oral Statement submitted for the Seventh Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime by Caritas Internationalis (International Confederation of Catholic Charities) – on Agenda 2 (b) - Trafficking in Persons Protocol

Mr. President, Caritas Internationalis (an international confederation of 164 Catholic charities), strongly supports the ratification and implementation of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols, in particular the Trafficking in Persons Protocol (Palermo Protocol) as well as the adoption of the Review Mechanism of the Convention.

One of the priorities of Caritas members' work is to serve marginalized and abused people, including victims of trafficking, as well as to promote regaining justice for them. For this purpose, it coordinates the network of Christian Organizations against Trafficking (COATNET – that brings together 38 organisations) in order to facilitate transnational assistance and support of victims and to protect the most vulnerable groups, in particular migrants, from trafficking and abuse.

Churches, religious congregations and Church-related organizations around the world are active partners of COATNET and join forces in raising awareness against trafficking both at local and global levels and assist victims at grass-root level. As a network, our members constantly witness the hardships and abuses that migrant workers and refugees suffer and highlight the lack of adequate mechanisms to protect them from various forms of exploitation from criminal groups. Migrants that became victims of trafficking should be offered real access to justice through effective redress mechanisms, independently of their migration status.

Many of our members witness that unscrupulous recruitment agencies may become traffickers of migrant domestic workers who end up in bonded labour. Their working conditions are close to slavery, as their passport is confiscated and they are not allowed to leave their employer's home or communicate with their family. The inspection of work places is often not possible and it creates additional difficulty to identify these victims. Such agencies should be criminally persecuted.

Our evidence shows that without strong collaboration between government agencies, especially the law enforcement ones, and civil society organizations, the response to the

trafficking crime will be less effective. Victims show much confidence in civil society organizations including faith-based and Church structures to accompany them during the legal procedures, whereas the strong potential of the Church and other faith-based organizations to reach the most vulnerable communities may prevent many abuses through raising awareness.

Therefore, some of our members work on building long term working relationships with law enforcement agencies in their context. For example, Catholic Bishops Conference of the US often works with Victim Witness Coordinators of the Department of Homeland Securities' investigative units on specific human trafficking case consultations. They have also partnered with the National Sheriff's Association on training and educational efforts related to identifying and responding to cases of human trafficking. Such efforts strengthen local cooperation and working relationships between social service, faith based and other community organizations and law enforcement.

In Lebanon, Caritas evidences the crucial importance of effective cooperation with law enforcement agencies. According to their practice, once initial identification done by government agents, they refer victims to NGOs who provide safe temporary accommodation, social, humanitarian, psychological and legal assistance. They witness that a multi-disciplinary approach with government ownership and civil society participation are a prerequisite for sustainable and comprehensive assistance and protection of Victims of Trafficking.

To conclude, we welcome all the efforts of the Conference to promote cooperation and a better coordination of anti-trafficking activities. We would like to highlight the importance of a stronger presence of civil society organizations in the future Review Mechanism and in the national coordination of anti-trafficking activities through promoting partnerships of law enforcement and NGOs assisting victims.

Thank you for your attention.