

Transcript of Speech by Panelist Innocentia G. Apovo Monteiro, coordinator of the human trafficking unit at INTERPOL

Thank you so much, Ladies and Gentlemen, it's a great honor for me to be part of this discussion, this session, that I found very fruitful, very productive, you know, a lot of information ongoing. And that is definitely what we need: to strengthen our ability and capacities to better fight this heinous phenomenon around the world. So for one, I would like to thank very much the organizers and all the parts involved in this.

And is it a great pleasure for me to speak on behalf of INTERPOL. I am currently the coordinator of the human trafficking unit at INTERPOL. So, when it comes to talk about human trafficking, I want to start saying that it is a transnational crime, a very complex crime that affects most of the countries, most of the regions in the world. So, this affects also most of the people, mainly the vulnerable people, this regardless of their race, their origin, their sex, and everything, you know. We are all vulnerable to human trafficking. It is also a type of organized crime that violates, or generates a massive human rights violation, so that's why it is definitely crucial for all of us to focus on this phenomenon and try to put it out from our society.

I would also like to emphasize that human trafficking is a sort of crime that has a lot of ramifications, a lot of connection with other transnational and organized crime such as smuggling of migrants, money laundering, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, terrorism, for incest, child exploitation, environmental crimes... And it is a crime that has a lot of diverse ramifications, a lot of ramifications with these other transnational crimes. What does this really mean? It means that if you want to combat human trafficking, you really need to be, to adopt, you know, a holistic approach, not only focused on the crime, but also on the other organized crimes that it could have ramifications with. This poses a lot of challenges, you know, to us as law enforcement, I mean police officers and even judiciary actors, because when you are not really specialized in this domain, when you are not aware that this crime can have a ramification with other organized crimes, you may not see the whole investigation and the consequence, the immediate consequence, is that you will leave the victim in their pain and then you will allow perpetrators to run away.

And that is where INTERPOL stands in, because our mission is to facilitate the cooperation among our member countries in order to allow them, you know, to combat transnational and organized crime in general, and particularly human trafficking and the related crimes. So, our mission, we really facilitate this cooperation, we really support our member countries to share their time, to share their task, to cooperate, you know, in a way to not allow the criminals, perpetrators to run away. So, by doing that, INTERPOL has developed and put, made available a large range of policies and capabilities that each member countries can use on a daily basis. I can, for instance, mention our notices, our databases that allow our member countries to effectively combat this phenomenon. I can give a simple example of one of our notices that we used or recommend to our member countries. It is the purple notice that allows member countries to share information on specific modus operandi.

And recently we have received a lot of requests related to the use of AirB&B in sexual abuse of the victim, a lot of requests also related to the modus operandi of the way that they pack

the victim in the trunk and transport them from one point to another point. So, these are the kind of modus operandi that need to be shared, you know, in a very real time. The most popular notice that all people around the world are aware with is the red notice. The red notice that is the one issued against a wanted person, particularly in the framework of this meeting, I would say the fugitive traffickers. So how do we track them? INTERPOL tries to organize some operations [...] what we call investigative support to the member countries in order for them to try and arrest, to locate also these traffickers that are running away. So that allows us to end impunity and provide justice to the victim. And that is definitely how we can end, or contribute to end this phenomenon.

And when it comes to the sexual exploitation, you know this is the most serious part of human trafficking, because it is affecting a large community around the world, it has the lowest risk, you know, because difficult to identify, because also the victim cannot, they keep silent, they are not speaking out. And also, most lucrative activity. So, this sexual exploitation it also affects all the regions.

During my mission at INTERPOL, and to our operation I experienced a lot of cases, I worked on a lot of cases that related to a girl from East Africa, from West Africa, from Eastern Europe, from all over the world, from South Africa, from Asia. And then, after these cases, and as I worked with the countries, I noticed there is something missing, there is some proactive action mission, you know. From my perspective and from INTERPOL perspective also, we try to encourage our member countries to invest and develop a lot of proactive action to avoid this person, these vulnerable girls, to fall into the hands of the criminals. So, when it comes to the law enforcement, for instance, what are we providing in terms of proactive action, is to train them. So, INTERPOL provides a lot of range, large range of capacity building activities. Ranging from the basic training to the train the trainer even to some specialized training. For instance, in 2019, we supported the member countries from the Balkan region for some capacity building activities. And one of the key requests of the countries there was training on the impact of the internet, you know, online investigation and financial investigation. So very quickly we adapted our agenda and then we brought on board this specialist, a person with this kind of abilities from our specialized internal unit of INTERPOL and we provided this kind of training.

But what is lacking, you know, the number of persons that is trained is not the number of persons that should be trained. So, we need more training. We need to keep training law enforcement, and particularly the judiciary actors that are key to end impunity. We definitely need to involve them to all that we are doing. And that is what we experienced in the Balkan region, and even during one of our programs in the Sahel region, we tried to associate from the beginning all the judges and the prosecutors operating in this region. So, they were part of all our training sessions from the beginning to the end, from the basic training to the train the trainer sessions. So, at the end of the project when we decide together with them to go to an operation in this mount of the criminal group, they were all motivated and the positive impact, the positive part of this, is that after this operation the number of traffickers arrested that were persecuted is higher than the other years that we didn't associate the judges and the prosecutors. So that impacted a lot and I think this is a practice that we need to encourage.

We need to reinforce also the international cooperation allowing and encouraging member countries to work together, to share information, to share data about the criminal in order to stop them to run away. The victims are suffering and we definitely need to end up this

impunity by working together. And when I talk about working together, it concerns even the national agencies. I am a police officer from Benin, and I know that sometimes there is even a competition between the forces internally. While the criminals are running away, we are here competing for nothing. So, we definitely need to reinforce our cooperation internally, regionally and internationally in order to effectively counter this heinous phenomenon.

I would also like to mention one of the obstacles that sometimes, that we sometimes face, it is the legal framework you know. This legal framework is a very, is an important issue, because in some of the countries, they don't have a specific legal framework on human trafficking, so all that they are doing is only based on the penal code in the criminal law. So that is not enough. We definitely need to encourage each member country, all the countries around the world, that this is a very serious crime that requires a specific legal framework. That will allow them to strengthen the legal framework and the way to prosecute. Because when law enforcement don't have the tools, the legal tools to prosecute, they cannot do their job. So, this legal framework needs to be raised up. And also, I mentioned the interagency-cooperation already. An organization of the legal framework that is definitely something important, at least at regional level. And also, maybe I can also say that we can maybe recommend a revision of the Palermo protocol as well, and to adapt it a bit to the current challenges, because you know, with the rise of the internet, the use of the internet and other types of challenges, such as the crypto currencies for instance. There is a lot of challenges that are caused now. To law enforcement communities, we were not trained from the beginning to investigate online, so but now the crime has shifted online. So, we need to be equipped very well in order to continue providing the adequate support of the victim and also continue identifying the traffickers and network members online. Because I am sure that in 10 years we will definitely have a lot to do online than physically in terms of human trafficking. Today you can buy your passport online, you can buy your false visa online, you can get your flight ticket online. So, things are getting easy for traffickers than for us law enforcement. So when it comes to sexual exploitation, this is a crime that really deserves an international cooperation and I would like to ask all the member countries and participants here to take advantage of the policing and capabilities that INTERPOL is putting in place, you know, that INTERPOL offers in order to effectively and in a very cooperative way combat this phenomenon. I will stop here waiting for questions and thank you so much. If you allow me, I can continue till tomorrow but I know that the time is running away, so thank you so much for your attention. I am standing ready to supply any clarification if needed, thank you.

(Unverified transcript by Caroline Sander (GGMH) - Do not quote)