

Speech: “Trafficking is a development issue, it’s a human rights issue, and it’s a security issue. It needs a coherent UN response.”

Thank you Mr President,

It’s clear that people trafficking is a scourge that unites the membership of the United Nations. No country is immune from this awful crime, and so it is right that every country is united in our shared commitment, made in the 2030 Agenda, to end forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking.

Making sure the Global Plan of Action helps deliver on this commitment will require that we act across a number of fronts. Let me highlight four.

First, we must bring further political attention to the issue of human trafficking: the hidden nature of this crime makes it too easy to ignore. The United Kingdom launched a ‘Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking’ as world leaders and their representatives gathered in New York last week. This statement of political intent explicitly welcomes and aligns very closely with the Global Plan. Thirty-seven countries have endorsed this Call and I urge others to do the same.

Second, every country should develop and implement a national strategy that addresses the four key elements of prosecution, protection, prevention and partnerships. The UK’s approach is underpinned by its 2014 Modern Slavery Strategy. To uncover the scale of the problem, every country could also consider producing an estimate of prevalence and statistics on trafficking. In 2013 we estimated there were up to 13,000 victims in the United Kingdom.

Third, we must ensure that trafficking is stamped out of our economies. The International Labour Organization estimates that forced labour generates \$150bn of illegal profits each year. We must better regulate labour policies and work with business to eradicate trafficking from supply chains. The UK’s Modern Slavery Act requires every business with global revenues of over \$48 million to report on the action it is taking. Governments, too, must address their own procurement practices.

Fourth, our law enforcement and criminal justice systems need specialist capabilities. The UNODC’s last report told us, the number of global convictions remains too low. The UK introduced a comprehensive legal framework in 2015 – and we are now seeing growing numbers of convictions for the new offences it introduced. We are also investing over \$11 million in the police and training over 300 new specialist investigators.

Mr President,

Trafficking is a development issue, it's a human rights issue, and it's a security issue. It needs a coherent UN response. But to date we have not seen enough progress to address the scale and urgency of the problem. We need UN agencies cooperating and using ICAT effectively – not competing over resources and turf. We urge the Secretary-General to help resolve this persistent challenge.

Because whether we describe it as human trafficking, modern slavery, or forced labour, we must stand together if the exploitation of human beings is to end. We have reviewed our global plan, so let us now act.

Thank you.