

Belarus' role in global fight against human trafficking

Human trafficking is an increasingly pressing issue for the international community. Trafficking in persons, especially women and girls, is a major challenge of the present time. It is estimated, that hundreds of thousands of people annually become victims of such crime.

The Republic of Belarus was one of the first countries, among CIS member-states, proceeded large-scale activities to tackle trafficking in persons.

With due account of international experience the Republic of Belarus worked out comprehensive national legislation, aiming at elimination of trafficking in persons, as well as a number of large-scale measure were implemented in the framework of State programmes to increase the effectiveness in combating trafficking in persons and ensuring national security.

In the Republic of Belarus actions against trafficking in persons has been set as a priority of national policy.

During the UN 2005 Summit, the President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko proposed to intensify international anti-trafficking efforts. To that end, Belarus put forward an idea of forging a Global Partnership against Slavery and Trafficking in Human Beings in the 21st century that would unite efforts and best practices of all major stakeholders, actively involved in trafficking in persons issues, and foster a concerted UN response to this heinous crime.

As a first step towards the Global Partnership, Belarus initiated the resolution “Improving the coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons”, which was adopted by consensus at the 61st UN session of the General Assembly in 2006 (A/RES/61/180). Then, at the 63rd and 64th sessions of the UN General Assembly in 2008 (A/RES/63/194) and 2009 (A/RES/64/178) respectively, the resolutions on the same issue reconfirmed importance in promoting better anti-trafficking cooperation globally.

The resolution of 2006 set up an Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT), comprised of 17 UN agencies and related organizations, actively involved in trafficking in persons issues, in particular UNODC, IOM, ILO, UNICEF, UNESCO, OHCHR, OHCR, aiming at improving coordination of global efforts against human trafficking. In 2006 Belarus contributed to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime to support the ICAT activities.

In 2007, Belarus organized an International Conference “Trafficking in Women and Girls: Meeting the Challenge Together”. The first global and all-engaging forum on human trafficking ever held in the UN Headquarters, the Conference gathered over 400 participants from more than 90 Member States, around 20 international organizations and over 100 NGOs. It focused on defining the factors that impede closer international anti-trafficking cooperation

and outlining the actions the UN had to take to help improve international response to human trafficking.

In partnership with International Organization for Migration, an International Training Centre on Migration and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was established in Minsk in 2007 in the premises of the Academy of the Ministry of Interior Affairs. The Centre conducts seminars, round tables, workshops and training courses for law enforcement representatives and other experts from across the globe, in particular from CIS region and different Arab countries.

At the initiative of Belarus, which was supported by a number of other states, the UN General Assembly held the first-ever thematic debate on human trafficking in 2008, articulated a call for urgent and efficient measures to tackle that challenge. Another thematic debate on trafficking in persons issues, initiated by Belarus, was conducted in 2009.

The 2008 UN Economic and Social Council resolution 'Strengthening coordination of the United Nations and other efforts in fighting trafficking in persons', yet another Belarusian initiative, in order to enhance the role of the ECOSOC as a major UN body in dealing with anti-trafficking. In particular, this resolution invited UN Member States to consider to draw up a UN action plan or strategy in fighting human trafficking and set up measures to further support the ICAT activities.

The Belarusian efforts in combating human trafficking were highly recognized by the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children of the UN Human Rights Council, who visited the Republic of Belarus in May 2009.

In the recent past Belarus hosted four High-level international conferences, regarding promotion of better coordination and interaction between countries, international organizations and NGO in combating human trafficking. Three conferences took place in Moscow, one was held in New York. The high-level representatives of governments and specialized international bodies, including the Director-General of the International Labor Organization participated in these events.

All actions, initiated by Belarus within UN in the sphere of combating trafficking in persons, were aimed at elaboration and adoption of the UN plan on combating human trafficking, that guarantees efficient coordination of actions of all international forces, including UN member states, international and local organizations, the private sector, civil society and mass media.

In 2010 at the initiative of Belarus a Group of Friends United against Human Trafficking was created in the United Nations, by now comprised of 22

states from all regions of the world¹. The Group of Friends gave an impetus to spur the process of consultations on the elaboration of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, held in May-June 2010 in the UN headquarters.

The Group of Friends held its first Ministerial Meeting on the margins of the 65th session of the United Nations in September 2010, which was presided by Belarus as a coordinator of the Group. During the Meeting the Ministers discussed further activities of the Group of Friends in the global fight against human trafficking, including, inter alia, implementation of the Global Plan of Action, and adopted a Final Declaration, circulated as an official document of the 65th session of the General Assembly (A/RES/65/497).

Later Belarus in its capacity as a coordinator of the Group of Friends convened the Second and Third Ministerial Meetings on the margins of the UNGA sessions, which were circulated as official documents of the General Assembly (A/66/398) и A/67/497.

As a crucial step forward in implementation of counter-trafficking initiative of the President of the Republic of Belarus, the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking was adopted by consensus at the 64th session of the UN General Assembly on 30 July, 2010 (A/RES/64/293). The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon officially launched the Global Plan of Action on 31 August, 2010, highly had recognized its importance.

The Global Plan of Action stipulates implementation of the concrete actions aimed at strengthening international cooperation in preventing the crimes, related to human trafficking, and prosecution of the involved criminals. The Global Plan harnesses the efforts of all stakeholders: Governments and, civil society and the private sector, international organizations, mass media. One of its most significant elements is creation and operationalization of a United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for victims of trafficking in personas, especially women and children, which aimed at protecting vulnerable people and providing humanitarian, legal and financial aid to victims of trafficking in persons. Belarus was one of the first countries, contributed to this Trust Fund.

Pursuant to the Global Plan, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime has prepared a Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, which offers an assessment of global trends in this area. The Global Report was published in December 2012 and is posted on the UNODC web-site.

In 2011 the 20th session of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice adopted a resolution “Implementation of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons” tabled by Belarus.

Belarus initiated with the full support of the UN Member States the

¹ Bangladesh, Bahrain, Belarus, Bolivia, Venezuela, Egypt, India, Kazakhstan, Qatar, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Nigeria, Nicaragua, United Arab Emirates, Russia, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Philippines, Ecuador, Singapore, Laos

provisions regarding the necessity of the implementation of the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons to the important documents and decisions of the main UN bodies, in particular, the UN General Assembly, ECOSOC, UN Human Rights Council, UN Commission on the Status of Women, UN Commission on Population and Development, UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice as well as the 6th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (October 2012).

Belarus initiated with the support of the Group of Friends United against Human Trafficking and under the auspices of the President of the General Assembly the interactive dialogue “Fighting Human Trafficking: Partnership and Innovations to End Violence against Women and Children”, held on 3 April 2012 in the UN Headquarters. This event provided an opportunity to intensify cooperation among all stakeholders actively involved in global fight against human trafficking: governments, international organizations, the private sector, civil society for the betterment of protection of victims of trafficking. The UN Secretary-General backed this dialogue and made an intervention during the discussion.

Another resolution entitled “Improving coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons” (A/RES/67/190) tabled by Belarus was adopted by consensus at the 67th session of the UN General Assembly.

In accordance with provisions of the aforementioned resolution a High Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on human trafficking took place on 13-14 May 2013 at the UN Headquarters in New York for the first time in the United Nations history. The meeting was attended by top UN officials and heads of the UN entities, including the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the President of the General Assembly Vuk Jeremić, the Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UNODC Yury Fedotov, the Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN-Women Lakshmi Puri, as well as representatives of 86 Member States and more than 100 international and national NGOs. At the meeting Belarus announced its decision to provide 50 thousand US dollars as its contribution to the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Human Trafficking, Especially Women and Children.

On 26 September 2013 in New York the 4th Ministerial meeting of the Group of Friends united against trafficking in persons was held under the chairmanship of Belarus in the margin of the 68th session of the UN General Assembly. Officials of the international organizations, including UNODC, UNDP, UNFPA, UN-Women, IOM, UNHCHR, and high level representatives of foreign ministries of the Member States of the Group of Friends took part in the meeting.

In November 2013 the UN General Assembly at its 68th session adopted a

new resolution initiated by Belarus “Improving the coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons” (A/RES/68/192). The resolution has 53 co-sponsors.

In accordance with the resolution the General Assembly:

- decided to appraise the progress achieved in the implementation of the Global Plan of Action on a four-year basis;
- also decided to designate 30 July as the World Day against Trafficking in Persons to be observed every year beginning in 2014;
- invited to give due consideration to the commitment on combating trafficking in persons in elaborating the post-2015 development agenda;
- also invited to consider the need for meeting of representatives of national coordinating mechanisms on combating trafficking in persons;
- encouraged to elaborate a list of concrete measures planned until 2017 aimed at implementing the Global Plan of Action.

On 26 November 2013 Belarus acceded to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, thus becoming the first non-member state to join this treaty. The Convention entered into force in Belarus on 1 March 2014.

At the 23rd session the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (12-16 May 2014, Vienne) successfully adopted the resolution entitled “Preventing and combating trafficking in human organs and trafficking in persons for the purpose of organ removal” (23/2) that was initiated by Belarus. The resolution has among co-sponsors the Russian Federation and the U.S. It focuses attention on the problem of trafficking in persons for the purpose of organ removal and in practical terms requests UNODC to conduct a study on trafficking in human organs. Belarus believes that this initiative will give a new impetus to the comprehensible consideration of the problem of trafficking in human organs not only by CCPCJ, but the UN as a whole.