

COMMEMORATING WORLD DAY AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS 2021

Counter Trafficking in Persons Technical Working Group (CTIPTWG) of the Bangladesh United Nations Network on Migration (BDUNNM) organised a webinar on July 28, 2021, to commemorate World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, 2021. The "Global Action Against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants - Bangladesh (GLO.ACT-Bangladesh)" project, funded by the European Union and jointly implemented by UNODC and IOM, provided support in organising this event. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.



MAHDY HASSAN,
National Programme
Officer, UNODC,
Chair of the Counter
Trafficking in Persons
Technical Working
Group & Moderator
of the Webinar

Today, we are here to commemorate World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, 2021. This year's theme, "Victims' Voices Lead the Way", puts the victims of human trafficking at the centre of the campaign and highlights the importance of listening to and learning from the survivors. The challenges we jointly face in tackling human trafficking and migrant smuggling are vast - these are complex and diverse crimes, requiring proactive evidence collection, highly skilled and strategic law enforcement and prosecutors as well as experts in fields as diverse as child trafficking, forced labour, organ removal and even money laundering and cybercrime.



MIA SEPPÖ, UN
Resident Coordinator
in Bangladesh

Migration is an important instrument for development; however, irregular migration, more often linked to perilous journeys and frequently interlinked with human trafficking and migrant smuggling exploits the desperation of the vulnerable and puts lives at unnecessary risk. Particularly in times of crises, as the world is experiencing now, when millions of people are losing their livelihoods on a daily basis, more and more become susceptible to deceptive job opportunities abroad in a pursuit of a better life. Especially women and children, who already disproportionately bore the brunt of trafficking, are facing unprecedented hardships.

The Government of Bangladesh has been instrumental in promoting the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and another important milestone was achieved in 2019 with the country's accession to the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

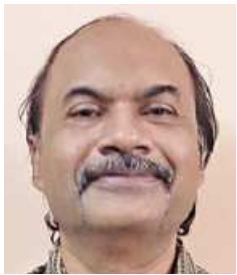
To be able to effectively address this deeply rooted problem, we must adopt a holistic approach, involving all of society, including the government, civil society, the private sector, trade unions, migrants, diaspora communities, the academic experts and community leaders. This is vital to share information and understand and recognize the new developments and patterns, identify key policy and implementation issues along with gaps and challenges. Our joint expertise can help us respond and adapt the existing tools and approaches to the emerging threats, such as during the COVID-19, anticipate future trends and devise concrete strategies to ensure that no one is left behind.



DIPTA RAKSHIT,
Team Leader-
Ashshash, Winrock
International

Switzerland supported Ashshash project of Winrock International in collaboration with UNODC organised a webinar on July 26, 2021, where 36 survivors from 10 districts discussed their experiences. One important recommendation from these survivors was to provide quality pre-departure training for at least three months before going abroad. Language classes should be provided as part of this training. They requested direct intervention at the destination country by the Government to prevent the confiscation of mobile phones and passports by their employers. The Government should also facilitate shelters and safe homes, along with counselling and immediate health support.

For those returning to the country, one recommendation is the establishment of special cells and quality support centres at airports, to enable survivors to overcome their trauma and lodge immediate complaints. Financial aid and start-up-based capital support from the government, and public and private financial institutions, should be made more easily accessible to the survivors, so that they can start their own business ventures to become financially independent.



AKM MASUD ALI,
Executive Director,
INCIDIN Bangladesh

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladesh is currently receiving a huge number of returnee migrants. Many have suffered from contract violations, abrupt discontinuation of employment and wage theft.

The routes that smugglers use to transport refugees and migrant workers across borders illegally are being increasingly used by traffickers. Among those who went through these routes, over 269 have been declared dead or are still missing for the period of January to May 2020. This has become even worse during the Covid-19 situation, as formal channels of migration have been difficult to access.

The current closure of formal channels requires immediate attention, and there should be specific awareness-raising programmes for potential migrants to prevent them being the victims of trafficking. Additionally, the capacity of courts should be expanded.



PROF ISHRAT SHAMIM,
President, Centre for
Women and Children
Studies

Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, women and girls are becoming increasingly vulnerable to trafficking. Through social media, traffickers are targeting young girls. These traffickers approach these young girls and women with promises of employment opportunities in 'Covid-19 free' locations.

Young girls are either subjected to child marriage or are forced to work to compensate for their financial situation. As a result, traffickers find this to be an opportune moment to traffic women from these groups. Immediate awareness-raising steps should be taken by the government to ensure that the most vulnerable groups do not fall prey to these traffickers.



SIOBHAN MULLALLY,
UN Special
Rapporteur on
Trafficking in Persons,
especially women
and children and key
speaker of the webinar

The survivors of trafficking, having been direct victims, have better understanding and knowledge of the implications of trafficking for the lives of survivors. Therefore, their voices are essential to finding and implementing anti-trafficking actions and

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide quality pre-departure training, including language classes, for at least three months before migration
- Introduce facilities at the District Employment and Manpower Office for mandatory visa checking and paperwork verification
- Ensure direct intervention by the Government at the destination country to prevent the confiscation of mobile phones and passports by employers
- Special cell for lodging complaints, emergency support and counselling services should be made available at the airport for returnees
- Separate vaccination facilities should be made available for outgoing migrants
- Trafficking cases should be dealt in a timely manner in accordance with the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012
- Financial aid and start-up-based capital support should be made accessible to the survivors so that they can start their own business ventures
- Recognise and address the fact that formal channels are also being used for human trafficking
- Conduct awareness campaigns to ensure that the most vulnerable groups are familiar with common human trafficking traps

policies. A human rights-based approach is essential in our response to human trafficking.

The Global Compact for Migration includes 10 commitments to eradicate human trafficking. We need to address how we will operationalise this objective, and how we can ensure that the targets and indicators which we agree upon can translate to meaningful change.

Pre-departure training and support for migrant workers are one of the most important steps to take with regard to this. Long-term social inclusion methods should also be implemented to combat the stigmatisation of survivors, which is often referred to as the 'burden of economic shame'.

We need to address discriminatory laws in our migration policies that impose additional conditions on access to social protection. These discriminatory laws fail to identify and protect victims and survivors, who may be afraid to come forward and report their experiences of exploitation. The non-punishment principle is the key to a human rights-based approach to responding to human trafficking. If we are prosecuting, punishing, arresting, and forcefully returning the victims of trafficking, we are targeting the wrong people.

One priority is to focus on labour exploitation and trafficking in the migration movement. Objective 10 of the Global Compact requires expanding safe and regular migration pathways with protection for migrant workers and their families.

Much of anti-trafficking action globally has remained largely rooted in a criminal justice and law enforcement model which is important to combatting impunity but we also need to address the labour dimensions for better and more effective action to enforce and extend the scope of labour rights for all migrant workers. We need to

our Human Rights Officer works with TIP champions. Going forward, USAID will launch a five-year Fight Slavery and TIP program, and our Embassy will continue supporting migrant workers affected by COVID-19 and other victims of both sex and labor trafficking, including Rohingya refugees. Success in all these initiatives relies on expanding and deepening key partnerships.



**AHM HABIBUR
RAHMAN BHUIYAN,**
Joint Secretary,
Law and Justice
Division, Ministry
of Law, Justice and
Parliamentary Affairs

Trafficking is a global challenge demanding both a national and global response. It also requires strong partnership, commitment, and engagement of all sectors. Trafficking is a complex crime that requires extensive



strictly regulate recruitment agencies. It must be noted that men and boys may also be victims of labour and sexual exploitation and they may face difficulties when disclosing and reporting these issues.



JOANNE WAGNER,
Chargé d'Affaires,
United States
Embassy, Bangladesh

People who fear losing their jobs - including because of the COVID-19 - and are desperate to find work to feed their families are some of the most vulnerable to trafficking.

The United States is collaborating with the government, civil society organizations, the private sector, trade unions, and survivor group leaders to address the vast scale, complexity, and impacts of this terrible crime. Bangladesh has enhanced its efforts, seriously tackling the enormous challenges posed by human trafficking and making genuine progress - despite the COVID-19. It has established seven anti-trafficking

investigation and whose goals go beyond just ensuring justice for the victims.

In Bangladesh, the judiciary has always played a central role at the final stage of the criminal justice process, and it is determined to ensure that human traffickers are convicted. Recognizing the importance of the judiciary, the human trafficking legislation has set up seven anti-human-trafficking offence tribunals in seven divisional districts. In the future, we hope to increase the number of tribunals and to ensure that legal proceedings can continue even amidst situations such as the pandemic.



**MD ZAINAL ABEDIN
MOLLAH,**
Additional Secretary,
Enforcement
Wing, Ministry of
Expatriates' Welfare
and Overseas
Employment

Human trafficking is a heinous crime against society. In Bangladesh, we have both skilled and low-skilled labour, and these people are often desperate for better working opportunities. Due to insufficient working opportunities in the country, they opt to migrate and work abroad, and this is when they become susceptible to falling prey to human trafficking.

By raising awareness among the communities of potential migrants, we can significantly reduce the number of human trafficking cases. We can run campaigns to create awareness among people through social media and with the help of local community leaders. The involvement of local governments in these awareness campaigns is a key. NGOs should also actively try and inform local communities in which they are working about the threat of human trafficking.

An important tool in these awareness-raising efforts would be the inclusion of the stories of our survivors. By telling the stories of actual survivors we can ensure that anyone who is a potential migrant understands the consequences of trafficking.



ADVOCATE SALMA ALI,
President, Bangladesh
National Women
Lawyers' Association
(BNWLA)

We have comprehensive laws and monitoring cells in the country to combat human trafficking. But we must move from theory to practice. We should learn from the experience of other countries which have been successfully combatting human trafficking. The involvement of police and other related law enforcement agencies should be ensured if we want a clear overview of what steps we should take.



MASUD BIN MOMEN,
Foreign Secretary of
Bangladesh

The Government of Bangladesh is deeply concerned by the recent humanitarian tragedy in the Mediterranean coast of Tunisia and Libya. The Bangladeshi victims who were rescued reported that they were enticed by traffickers with offers of high paying and secure jobs in Europe.

The Government of Bangladesh has a zero-tolerance policy on human trafficking and is actively taking steps to fight this horrific crime. Our commitment to combatting human trafficking is directly linked with our goals of sustainable development. We have formed a committee under the Ministry of Home Affairs to follow trafficking cases that have been filed. We have set up CICs at the union level, to ensure victims have increased accessibility. A monitoring cell has been operationalised at the police headquarters to collect and analyse data on human trafficking. We have also set up a seamless intelligence network across concerned law enforcement and border security agencies. As part of the awareness campaigns, counter-trafficking messages are already being disseminated through national media and other channels.

Covid-19, however, has reduced the effectiveness of these efforts, and we need to ensure that our plan of action also addresses the challenges posed by the pandemic. Collaboration between the government of the countries involved can help ensure that victims are returned safely and that traffickers are prosecuted appropriately. There are loopholes that exist in our counter-trafficking strategies, and these must be addressed immediately with the participation of all the relevant stakeholders.



SHAHIDUL HAQUE,
Former Foreign
Secretary and IOM
Policy Advisor

The pandemic has caused a lot of confusion and ambiguity surrounding the situation of formal migration which traffickers have capitalised on. There are a lot of assumptions upon which we built our existing migration policies. These assumptions are no longer relevant, but we continue to hang on to them, hoping that they will resolve human trafficking.

There is big power politics behind the human trafficking industry. It generates between USD 3.6-4.8 trillion annually. That is seven percent of the global GDP. The traffickers are very innovative in their approach of exploiting the vulnerable, and until and unless we are innovative in our approach to protecting these vulnerable groups, we will always be ten steps behind the traffickers.

We must come to accept the fact that traffickers are not just using irregular migration channels to traffic people. They are also using regular, formal channels of migration. Unless we come to terms with the fact that traffickers have been able to use formal and legal channels of migration, we cannot fully address the issue.



GIORGI GIGOURI,
Coordinator of
Bangladesh UN
Network on Migration
(BDUNNM) and
IOM Chief of Mission
in Bangladesh

Trafficking is a crime which puts migrant workers at risk in terms of physical and mental abuse, harassment, forced labour, forced and illegal marriages, illegal trade, and loss of lives. The government at all levels, development partners, law enforcement entities, civil society, the private sector, and all other relevant actors must make a concerted effort to take action to stamp it out.

Our message, from this webinar and the UN, is for everyone to continue to listen to the voices of survivors and to use their suggestions and recommendations to pave the way forward in the fight against human trafficking.

Providing protection and assistance to the survivors of human trafficking is the primary step that we must take. The pandemic has affected all our lives, but some have been affected worse than others. Our counter-trafficking strategies have suffered due to the pandemic, and all the while the trend in human trafficking has continued to increase.

The Bangladesh United Nations Network on Migration will continue to support the Government of Bangladesh, with a comprehensive approach which is aligned with the National Plan of Action to address human trafficking, Global Compact for Migration and various other policy documents in this area.