



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

AU CONVENE A REGIONAL CONFERENCE TO ADDRESS HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND SMUGGLING IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Khartoum, the Sudan, 13 October 2014: Experts and senior officials from the African Union, UN Agencies and the Horn of African countries, partners countries and organizations, gathered at a meeting opened today 13 October 2014, in the **Police Club House, Khartoum, the Sudan, in preparation for the African Union Regional Ministerial Conference on Human Trafficking and Smuggling in the Horn of Africa.**

Organized by the African Union (AU) in collaboration with the Government of the Sudan, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The Regional Ministerial Conference aims to explore cooperation among the member states in the region in addressing the challenges of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants within and from the Horn of Africa, and to come up with a common approach in addressing this issue.



The Minister of justice of the republic of the Sudan, Mr. Mohamed Bishara Dosa in his opening remarks affirmed on the Sudan's commitment of supporting the collective efforts of the region and the world in combating this phenomenon, and revealed that the Sudan has enacted a law to combat human trafficking in march 2014, as well as many articles have been included in the transitional constitution of the Sudan of 2005, aiming to protect individuals from trafficking, in addition to amendment of asylum law of 2014.

The Minister highlighted the procedures that tackled by the government of the Sudan in order to face the growing challenges of trafficking, such as establishing of specialized prosecution offices to investigate and supervise the investigation of the smuggling and trafficking crimes, also a national committee for victims protection. He emphasized that in the past few years, irregular migration to the Sudan turned into alarming phenomenon and became more complicated when it has taken a new dangerous dimension, where eventually turned from a merely individuals adventures of improving migrants, and refugees conditions, or take Sudan as a crossing point to Europe, or flee away from armed conflicts.

Mr. Bishara acknowledged that the current situation requires establishing a regional center for counter trafficking and illegal migration in Sudan with the support of the international community to serve the whole region.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Olawale Maiyegun, AUC Director of Social Affairs, affirmed on the AU's continued commitment towards facing up to the challenges of trafficking in persons and to help its member states to address this pressing issues.

The Director highlighted the frameworks that the AU adopted and initiated in this regard, namely: Ouagadougou Action Plan, the Migration Policy Framework for Africa, in 2006, and the African Union Commission Initiative Against Trafficking (AU.COMMIT) in 2009. These Instruments provided the required push for action and the number of countries having enacted anti-trafficking legislations more than doubled between 2003 and 2010. Consequently, more and more convictions of traffickers have been made possible and hopefully an increasing number of victims rescued and protected.

However, the Director acknowledged that, despite these initiatives, human trafficking and smuggling of migrants have remained a caustic challenge on the continent and particularly in the Horn of Africa. "Many Member States in the Sub-region are yet to ratify the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and or fully implement it with national legislation in their respective domain" he added, urging for greater cooperation in this regard.

Addressing the meeting, Mr. Ashraf Al Noor of the IOM Regional Office, said that the responding to the trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants requires strong close cooperation, information sharing and joint operations from the international community. Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers need to be afforded the utmost protection.

He emphasized on the importance of convening this Conference as all stakeholders can consolidate the structures and processes already in place, articulate their commitment to implementation, and recognize the range of partners involved in operational and agency-led responses.

Speaking on behalf of the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. António Guterres, Ms. Ann Encontre, Deputy Director of the UNHCR Bureau for Africa, highlighted the centrality of the international protection regime in any initiatives aimed at addressing the phenomenon of human trafficking in the Horn of Africa. She emphasized the need for strong partnerships among all stakeholders under the AU initiative.

The Deputy Director called for **more dialogue on the sharing of best practices, greater mutual legal assistance, more joint cooperation across borders, as well as national strategies and plan of action on human trafficking.** She reiterated on the **UNHCR** willing to assist all governments at the conference with the difficult task of combating the trafficking and smuggling of persons on the move whilst ensuring the rights and well-being of persons in need of international protection i.e refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable populations.



At the two-day Experts meeting, discussion will focus on the state of play of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants in the Horn of Africa. The Experts will formulate a clear way forward on the translation of various national, regional and international instruments into measures and common standards for

preventing trafficking in persons, and smuggling of migrants, prosecuting traffickers and smugglers, and providing assistance to victims of trafficking and other vulnerable migrants including refugees and asylum seekers. They will put concrete deliverables for the political endorsement of the Ministers.

The Regional Conference brings together delegations from the countries in the Horn of Africa and other stakeholders including: the AU, Sudan, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, South Sudan, and Somalia, Italy, Libya, Malta, Norway, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Switzerland, Regional Economic Communities, League of Arab States, Interpol, UNODC, EU and its Member States.

The Expert and Senior official meeting will conclude with deliverables that will be presented for endorsement to the Ministerial Conference on 16th October.