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Consultative Forum Advances Africa's Coordinated Response to Trafficking in Persons for Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia



The African Union Commission, through its Continental Operational Centre (COC) for Combating Irregular Migration, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), held a two-day Senior Officials Consultative Forum in Addis Ababa under the *theme, Consultative Forum on Trafficking in Persons for Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia*, to discuss the growing challenge of trafficking in persons for forced criminality. The

forum focused on the increasing exploitation of African nationals, particularly in Southeast Asia, where victims are lured through false job offers and forced into criminal activities, while also providing a platform to strengthen cooperation and develop coordinated responses to this evolving threat.

In his opening remarks, Maemo Peter Machethe, Director of the African Union Continental Operational Centre for Combating Irregular Migration, highlighted that trafficking in persons for forced criminality has become a global crisis, generating billions in illicit revenue and exploiting African citizens, often under inhumane conditions in scam compounds. He stressed that this form of trafficking is a grave violation of human rights, worsened by insecurity, conflict, and economic underdevelopment, with Southeast Asia identified as a major hub for such criminal networks. He urged Member States to strengthen national institutions, enhance cross-border cooperation, and adopt strategic interventions, including intelligence sharing, victim protection, and cyberspace policing. The Continental Operational Centre (COC) remains committed to coordinating these efforts with African Union Member States and international partners to combat trafficking, safeguard citizens, and uphold the security and unity of the continent.

H.E Amb. Churchill E. Monono, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Cameroon to the African Union and Chair of the PRC Sub-Committee for Migration, Refugees, and IDPs, declaring the event open, reiterated that Trafficking in persons for forced criminality, including online fraud, remains a growing concern affecting African citizens who are lured by false employment opportunities and subjected to abuse, exploitation, and human rights violations. Participants called for urgent, coordinated action to dismantle trafficking networks through strengthened cross-border cooperation, intelligence sharing, and enhanced collaboration with partners in Asia. The meeting also emphasized the need to protect and support victims through comprehensive reintegration and assistance measures.

In her opening remarks, Ms. Alice Kimani, Acting Officer in Charge at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Special Liaison Office to the AU and UNECA, underscored

the scale and complexity of trafficking in persons for forced criminality, noting its significant impact on African nationals. She emphasized the importance of the forum in advancing prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership efforts, while raising concern over the misidentification of victims as offenders, which further exacerbates their trauma and enables traffickers to operate with impunity. She called for collective and decisive action by all stakeholders to address this growing threat.

In her opening remarks, Ms. Frances Jacks, Development Counsellor at the UK Office to the African Union and UNECA, commended the African Union's leadership in addressing human trafficking across the continent. She highlighted the scale of the crisis, noting significant global revenues generated by scam-compound operations, and reaffirmed the United Kingdom's commitment to strengthening international cooperation to combat fraud and trafficking networks. She emphasized the need to address the criminalization of victims. She called for legal and institutional frameworks that uphold the principle of non-punishment, while enhancing prevention, protection, and prosecution efforts through stronger partnerships and coordinated action.

Delivering the concluding statement, Mr. Maemo Peter Machethe, Director of the African Union Continental Operational Centre for Combating Irregular Migration (COC), urged Member States to adopt practical and pragmatic measures to address trafficking in persons for forced criminality. He emphasized that the fight against this crime is critical to safeguarding the future of Africa's youth and protecting the continent's security and sovereignty. He further highlighted the importance of strengthened collaboration between the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, and partners, while encouraging sustained collective action to effectively combat the growing threat.

Closing the event, H.E. Amb. Churchil E. Monono, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Cameroon to the African Union and Chair of the PRC Sub-Committee on Migration, Refugees and IDPs, noted that the two-day meeting provided critical insights into the plight of African victims trafficked for forced criminality along dangerous migration routes, particularly towards East Asia. He emphasized that the experiences shared by Member States, experts, and survivors underscore the urgent need for coordinated and comprehensive action, guided by the principles of prevention, protection, prosecution, partnership, and policy. He called for strengthened collaboration at national, regional, continental, and international levels, and urged the development of concrete frameworks and follow-up actions to address the crisis, while reaffirming the Sub-Committee's commitment to advancing the issue within African Union decision-making processes.

The forum concluded with a renewed commitment from participants to strengthen collaboration, enhance coordinated responses, and advance practical measures to combat trafficking in persons for forced criminality. Participants underscored the importance of sustained partnerships, knowledge sharing, and collective action to protect vulnerable populations and dismantle transnational criminal networks, while reaffirming their shared responsibility to safeguard the dignity, security, and future of African citizens.

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