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Statement by H.E. Adv. Bience Gawanas, Commissioner for Social Affairs, AU Commission at the Launch of the AU.COMMIT Campaign for the SADC Region and Workshop on Operationalising the Ouagadougou Action Plan into a Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children
Johannesburg, 29-30 November 2011

Observing all protocols

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to start by expressing my sincere appreciation for your presence here and my deepest gratitude for the commitment shown by all of you to support and contribute to the AU.COMMIT Campaign. AU.COMMIT stands for the African Union Commission Initiative Against Trafficking and this campaign has been continentally launched in Addis Ababa, on 16 June 2009. Since then, the Africa Union Commission has joined with international partners, regional economic communities and civil society in West, East and South and North Africa in order to launch the campaign Continentally and to operationalise the Ouagadougou Action Plan into a strategy to combat trafficking in human beings, especially women and children.

The AU.COMMIT Campaign endeavors to raise awareness of the AU's continued commitment towards facing up to the challenges of trafficking in human beings throughout the Continent. The event for which we are gathered here today will thus serve to communicate the overall objectives and messages of the AU. COMMIT Campaign through media and press coverage. The AU. COMMIT campaign is aimed at galvanising activities undertaken by the AU Commission, including global, regional and national initiatives towards more synergized and coordinated actions to combat trafficking in persons in Africa.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

2010 marked the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, the international instrument that was initially adopted at UN level to assist and guide us in our fight against human trafficking. Its Plan of Action also advises us in developing adequate responses to curb this global plague that also heavily impacts our own Continent. However, for the purposes of our own reference, we are guided by the Ouagadougou Plan of Action adopted in Tripoli in November 2006 which also refers to the mentioned UN Protocol.

So let us look at the current picture of human trafficking in the world at large and in Africa in particular – what is the situation and where do we stand with our responses?

Virtually no country is immune against human trafficking, with countries affected being either country of origin, transit and destination country, or even

a combination of the three. As far as we currently know, victims of trafficking are predominantly trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, however, more and more cases of forced labour, of child begging and of organ trafficking, just to name a few other forms of exploitation are being identified. Women and children, but also men, fall prey to the tricks and intimidations of traffickers.

Instruments such as the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and the Ouagadougou Action Plan provide the required push for action. In response to the Trafficking Protocol for instance, the number of countries having enacted anti-trafficking legislation more than doubled between 2003 and 2008. Consequently, more and more convictions of traffickers have been made possible and hopefully an increasing number of victims rescued. This, however, should not hide the fact that – as we are talking now - impunity is still a major problem.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As much as we acknowledge the various national and regional efforts within the Continent in fighting and preventing the menace, far more remains to be done. A great number of victims of this heinous crime of African origin are found within the Continent while there are countless other long distance victims in Europe and other parts of the world.

Traffickers take advantage of the lack of legislative frameworks, vulnerable economic environments coupled with volatile political situations to operate with impunity. Despite the noticeable high level of trafficking in

persons within and outside the Continent, the criminal justice response is haphazard, uncoordinated and too slow. This is basically due to lack of information and awareness regarding the trafficking situation and capacity to tackle the affliction rather than a neglect or denial of the situation.

Many African States are yet to ratify the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and or fully implement it with specific legislation in their respective domain and today I urge our SADC Member States to galvanise your commitments to this course, also by ratifying the mentioned Protocol and to join us in implementing the Ouagadougou Action Plan in addressing this crime, in securing justice for victims on and from our continent, and in ending impunity for traffickers.

Let us not forget those who need our help, and let us act swiftly to protect them.

I hereby declare the AU.COMMIT Campaign duly launched in the SADC Region, and the Workshop for Regional Member State Representatives opened.

I thank you.