

UN General Assembly reaffirms commitment to combat human trafficking



A mother whose daughter was trafficked at the age of sixteen covers her face to protect her identity.© UNICEF/Jim Holmes

United Nations, November 22 (RHC)--The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated factors that fuel human trafficking such as poverty, unemployment and gender-based violence, the President of the UN General Assembly said on Monday, urging countries to boost efforts to prevent and respond to this “vile crime.”

Abdulla Shahid was speaking at the opening of a two-day high-level meeting to review progress in implementing the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, adopted by the General Assembly in July 2010.

Abdulla Shahid said the ongoing pandemic has left survivors of trafficking with less support, while countries have been weakened in their ability to identify and hold perpetrators accountable. “It is imperative that the global community redoubles its efforts to recover better from the pandemic and build resilient communities,” he told Member States.

“This includes obtaining more research, data, and analysis on how this crime is being carried out, how it is evolving, and who it is targeting and impacting. This will allow us to make better decisions on preventative measures and responses.”

People of all ages, backgrounds and nationalities can fall prey to human trafficking, which is linked to crimes such as illicit money flows, use of fraudulent travel documents and cybercrime.

Victims include those who are marginalized, or in difficult circumstances, such as undocumented migrants. Others might be desperate for a job or educational opportunities.

Ghada Waly, Executive Director at the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), explained that vulnerability has increased during the pandemic due to lockdowns, learning disruptions and loss of livelihoods. “The COVID crisis has deprived many victims of access to essential services,” she said in a pre-recorded message. “More time spent on line has also led to more exploitation, and to the misuse of technology.”

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