

**26th Session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
Vienna, 22 May**

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon

Thank you to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and the UNODC for holding this important session on assisting and protecting survivors of human trafficking.

Today I am honoured to address you as the UNODC Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking, and equally, as someone who has endured and survived this terrible crime myself.

I was 21 years old in August 2014, when fighters of the so-called Islamic State overran our village in Sinjar, northern Iraq, killed most of my family and thousands of other Yazidi families, and took us, the Yazidi women and children, to be transported at their will, held captive, bought and sold as property.

More than 3,000 Yazidi women and girls are still today the victims of human trafficking and an ongoing genocide, enduring rape and sexual slavery, and the unbearable loss of their relatives.

Human trafficking, especially of women and children, has played a central role in the genocide of my people, and is a central part of many conflicts around the globe.

In the context of war and genocide, trafficking aims to dehumanise the victims, to separate them from their own culture and community, to reduce them to objects to be commercialised.

Further, it is used to fund the perpetrators' violence, which means that the buying and selling of human beings is helping to continue this cycle of terror, enveloping ever more victims.

In the case of Daesh and its attacks against Yazidis, all of this was done within a well-organised system with official contracts for the buying of slaves, systematic categorising of women and girls by age and marital status, transportation and secure accommodation to ensure the trafficking operated smoothly and no one could escape....All of this was planned in advance.

The trafficking and slavery of women and girls is so fundamental to ISIS's ideology, it has published official guidelines encouraging its fighters to participate in these crimes and justifying it as a religious obligation.

Religion can never be used to justify acts of violence against civilians, or the atrocious crimes of trafficking and enslavement.

Similarly, in Nigeria, Boko Haram has made abduction and trafficking of women and girls as a form of terror which destroys the women themselves and shatters their families and community.

I was so happy to hear that some of the girls kidnapped from their school in Chibok, Nigeria, were recently released. But this was only after 3 years of enslavement and torture.

I know what those survivors are going through now. I can imagine what those girls who are still in captivity are facing every day, because my own relatives and friends are still suffering the same.

I am sure you all are also aware about numerous cases of human trafficking facing refugees and IDP camps and why we should stand up to this threat and fight this phenomenon.

From my side, I want to continue to raise awareness of the plight of victims and survivors of human trafficking in armed conflict and genocide.

I extend my hand to all survivors in solidarity and compassion, and make a commitment to all of them that I will do all I can to make the world pay more attention to these crimes, and to take action to hold perpetrators accountable under the full force of the law.

This criminal treatment of women and children can never be tolerated and the perpetrators must face justice.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to completely heal from the experience of being trafficked and enslaved. But if justice is served, it will give survivors hope to live their normal lives. It may also discourage others from following the same path.

In addition, post-conflict assistance and psychological support, like the program I was fortunate to be provided in Germany, is critical to help survivors of human trafficking rebuild their lives.

Human trafficking aims to degrade its victims, to dispossess them of their dignity. But it was not our honour that was lost, it was that of the perpetrators.

In speaking out about my own experiences, I hope that other survivors of human trafficking will be able to find the strength and the dignity that is always inside of us.

Thank you.