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Opening Remarks

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**The next decade: Promoting common priorities and greater coherence  
in the fight against human trafficking**

*UN Conference Room B (North Lawn Building)  
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Good morning.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

**Salutations**

On behalf of the Inter-agency group against trafficking in persons (ICAT) I would like to welcome you all to this important event. As the ICAT Chair for 2012, and also on behalf of UNICEF, I would like to express our appreciation to our co-hosts for the event, His Excellency, Ambassador Hans Lundborg representing Sweden and Ambassador Nay Mingeang of the Cambodian Mission, representing the Chair of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), for your presence today.

**Purpose of the meeting – identifying lessons learned and using them to inform future work**

The focus of our work today – human trafficking – is not new. In fact, human slavery, exploitation, abuse and violence that dehumanize the victim as well as the violator have been with us for centuries. As the Secretary General said at the launch of the “Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking Persons”, “*no country in the world is immune from its clutches*” – **neither the poorest nor the richest.**

But we are *not* here today to just talk about the horrendous nature of trafficking, and the blatant human rights violations that trafficking of human beings inflicts, especially on the world’s most vulnerable, particularly children and adolescents.

We are here today *to critically reflect on the work that we have done during the past decade* since the entry in force in 2003 of the *Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish*

*Trafficking in Persons especially Women and Children* and **to extend the reach and effect of our work**. Our expert panel will focus on and examine what we, as an “anti-human trafficking community”, have accomplished; determine where gaps remain and put forward ideas about what needs to be done better in the coming decade. What is particularly important today is that we shall approach our work as a community of actors, and **not** as individual entities. Our focus is the past to learn lessons and then to the future decade to apply these lessons.

### **Persisting challenges in fighting trafficking**

If we take a snapshot of the situation of trafficking at a point in time, we are presented with a daunting picture. We are dealing with the challenges of a \$32 billion “industry” – profit arising out of the exploitation of people held in slavery-like situations (ILO 2009). Depending on the methodologies used, the number of trafficked persons in the world ranges from some 800,000 across international borders annually (US State Department) to 27 million held in modern day slavery (Kevin Bales, 2009). We also know from various studies that of those who are trafficked, some 50% or around 1.2 million are children (ILO 2005). Without going into the technicalities of how these number are derived, our concern for the violation of human rights and for the breach of human dignity of those trafficked is this: **One person trafficked, one person denied of his or her human rights, one child abused, exploited and violated, who is denied the right to reach her or his potential, is one person too many.**

The challenge today is no less than it was at the adoption of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol over a decade ago. This may sound discouraging, but let us not be too pessimistic. Taking an objective view, we can say with some certainty that we are better equipped today than we were a decade ago to deal with the challenges.

### **What we know**

We have today a far better understanding of the issue. We know that while absolute and relative poverty plays a significant role in creating vulnerabilities, numerous other factors exacerbate the situation. Amongst them are inadequate legislation, fragile protective systems, weak enforcement, and harmful social practices, including gender discrimination. These challenges are found in places of origin and destination. We know more about the nature of the crime, that not only women and girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation – **which has**

*been a long-held misconception* - and for other exploitative purposes such as for domestic work, begging, work in sweat shops and on plantations. But so too are boys and men! Boys as young as five or six are also trafficked for camel jockeying and commercial fishing. Thus, our focus is to ensure collaboration between duty bearers from places of origin and those in the place of destination.

### **Efforts on the ground**

Today, some two thirds of the countries in the world have ratified the Trafficking in Persons Protocol (147 countries) with more than half these countries having legislation dealing both directly and indirectly with the issue (UNODC 2009). We have a number of regional mechanisms – and we look forward to hearing about one of them from our co-host from ASEAN – to address this crime, which has to be addressed not just at the national level but at regional and global levels. In this regard, I am happy to recall the 2010, **adoption of the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking**. Additionally, we have adequate programming guidance dealing with all aspects of anti-trafficking interventions such as for the protection of victims of trafficking that are age and gender sensitive; guidance on investigation; on ways to better implement prevention and most importantly to work with greater coordination, cooperation and cohesion. We are better equipped to combat human trafficking today than ever before.

### **What else do we need to do?**

**Are our efforts enough? No, definitely not ... we need to do more better.** The point that I would like to make here is to remind ourselves that we have a number of tools in hand today to do a better job all around, individually, *and more importantly, collectively*. The challenge is to scale up the full utilization of these tools and *translate our accumulated knowledge about human trafficking into results*.

The inter-agency coordination group against trafficking in persons (ICAT), on whose behalf I am speaking today, is representative of the effort to do just that. To work collectively on an issue that needs to be tackled collectively from various aspects with various areas of expertise. It is an issue that needs expertise in human and child rights, crime prevention, labour rights, child protection, gender and poverty alleviation, in emergency and non-emergency contexts. The agencies that are here today, as well as the national counterparts with whom we work with in member countries, attest to the *need for multiple areas of*

*expertise deployed in a coordinated way.* This is the only way to close the gaps and the loopholes that provide traffickers with a foot-hold to commit atrocities.

I am convinced that through our support to the interagency work, we will be able to look ahead from today and translate our commitments on paper to action on the ground. Our efforts will prove wrong the perceptions held by some, that human trafficking is a “*human rights subject on which governments and the international community have spoken so much about and yet done so little...*” Equipped with better tools and a firm commitment to apply the lessons learnt from the past decade, I am convinced that *we are better able to effectively and permanently abate trafficking of children and adults.*

#### **Going it alone will not succeed**

Your call for a coordinated approach through ECOSOC Resolution 2006/27 led to the formation of ICAT. Inter-agency effort, however, is demanding and needs strong leadership and firm support. A coordinated effort is never easy. We are often tempted to go it alone, with our individual mandates and expertise, but we know better. In addition to our individual and mandated efforts, we will have to take this non-too easy road of collaboration. In the name of millions of persons at risk of being trafficked, I count on your support.

#### **UNICEF's commitment**

Let me end my welcome by reiterating UNICEF's commitment to harness our programmes for strengthening child protection systems in more than 150 countries to support this interagency initiative. At this important juncture in time, where the post 2015 agenda is being developed, we need to ensure that child rights, women's rights and human rights remain central on the global agenda so that the issue of fighting trafficking will receive the attention and resources needed. With your continued collaboration, I know that we will make a sustained difference where the extent of our moral indignation will only be equaled by the results of our efforts.

I thank you all for your commitment and support and wish for fruitful discussion.