



Statement to mark World Day Against Trafficking in Persons,

Tuesday 30th July, 2019 -Kampala-Uganda,

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Women's Probono Initiative (WPI) in partnership with the Network for Public Interest Lawyers (NETPIL) are today calling upon the Ugandan Government to increase funding and strengthen regulations to prevent trafficking of persons especially women and children.

'**Trafficking in Persons**' as defined in Uganda's Prevention of Trafficking in Person's Act, 2009 as 'the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation'.

Uganda has been reported to be a hot spot for sourcing, transiting and a place where people are subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. Over 200,000 women and girls are reported to be in the Middle East offering domestic labour services (many are exported illegally), Ugandan children as young as seven are exploited in forced labor in agriculture, fishing, forestry, cattle herding, mining, stone quarrying, brick making, carpentry, steel manufacturing, street vending, bars, restaurants, and domestic service.

Recruiters target girls and women aged 13-24 years for domestic sex trafficking, especially near sports tournaments and road construction projects. It is reported that 7,000 to 12,000 children are engaged in prostitution in Uganda. It is reported that most internal trafficking victims are Ugandans, the majority of which are exploited in forced begging. Young girls are the most vulnerable to internal trafficking, mainly for labor or begging in Kampala and other urban areas. It is further unfortunate that government agencies such as police and prison authorities have been alleged to subject prisoners in pre-trial detention to forced labor too.

The category of people involved in trafficking Ugandans have been reported to include relatives or friends of victims, rich business women or labor recruiting agencies promising vulnerable Ugandans well-paid jobs abroad or in Uganda's urban towns. Pastors, imams, and local leaders at churches and mosques have also assisted in the recruitment of domestic workers abroad, mostly for Middle Eastern countries; these leaders encourage female domestic workers to take these jobs and in turn receive a fee per worker from recruiters. Some traffickers have threatened to harm the victims' family or confiscate travel documents.

Ms. Primah Kwagala, the Chief Executive Officer at the WPI notes that "challenges associated with prevention of trafficking in persons currently include a lack of regulations to make operational the Prevention in Trafficking of Persons Act, 2009, Lack of funding to support victims of human trafficking – many women and girls get stuck in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman, Abu Dhabi, Turkey, Thailand and several other countries but Ugandan embassies have no money to repatriate them. Migrant workers abroad often lack shelter on or upon repatriation at Ugandan embassies, victims abroad face a multiplicity of human rights abuses but the system to address these abuses is currently obscure to the victims and their relatives."

In the recent past there has been an uproar on the fate of Ugandans who are taken oversee under the labour externalization or labour export programme. It appears to us that there is no agreement between the different stakeholders on the implementation of the entire programme. In this error of right holders and duty bearers we should not have statements such as: 'persons should only deal with certified labour export companies;' 'the labour export companies take sole responsibility for whatever happens outside Uganda;' 'Uganda stands to lose a lot of revenue if the programme is halted;' and many more such statements. In a situation where labour is exported in total disregard on the law and where there is no accountability mechanism, then we are actually trafficking in persons.

The Call

The government needs to URGENTLY;

1. Put in place regulations to operationalize provisions for victim support in the Prevention in Trafficking of Persons Act, 2009;
2. Provide funding for supporting victims of human trafficking and related programs;
3. Prosecute persons, public officials and agencies involved in trafficking of persons;
4. Offer human rights training and awareness to law enforcement in the area of trafficking in persons;
5. Streamline and be transparent on the labour export programme.

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