

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Strengthening global commitments to eliminate human trafficking and modern slavery through collaborative international efforts and legal frameworks

President: Artemis Chan

Assistant presidents: Dora Mu, Amanda Huo

Introduction

Human trafficking, which refers to the illegal movement and coercion of individuals for exploitation, is a cross-continental issue that continues to plague countries in the 21st century. It is closely linked to modern slavery, an umbrella term encompassing forced labor, debt bondage, and other oppressive practices, which traps people in cycles of abuse. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), roughly 50 million people live in modern slavery as of 2022, a statistic that underscores the severity of this crisis. (International Labor Organization, 2022) Despite widespread condemnation and attempts to bring more attention to these issues, human trafficking and modern slavery are still especially prevalent. This is due to a multitude of reasons such as lax enforcement, corruption, and inequalities.

In 2000, the Palermo Protocol was the first global treaty defining human trafficking. But despite laying the groundwork, enforcement remained uneven. (United Nations, 2000) In 2022, an official United Nations Office On Drugs And Crimes report showed that the total amount of trafficking lowered due to the pandemic. (United Nations Office On Drugs And Crimes, 2022) In

the next year, the Global Slavery Index found that G20 nations—responsible for three-quarters of global trade—imported \$468 billion in goods tainted by forced labor. (Batha, 2023) These figures reveal how economic interests often overshadow human rights, allowing exploitation to persist across borders.

While the ILO's Forced Labour Protocol (2014)—ratified by 62 nations—sets vital standards for victim protection and workplace monitoring, as did the EU's 2021 Anti-Trafficking Directive, broader adoption and coordination across borders is urgently needed. Grassroots efforts, like those by the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, prove that public-private partnerships can disrupt trafficking supply chains. However, lasting change requires governments to align legal systems, center survivors in policymaking, and hold corporations accountable for labor abuses. Therefore, effectively addressing such a topic requires strong international cooperation, comprehensive legal frameworks, and flexibility. When creating solutions, it is important to consider how to safeguard survivors, crack down on illicit networks, and ensure that communities have the economic resources to function effectively without resorting to human trafficking and slavery.

Definition of Key Terms

Human trafficking:

This refers to the illegal trade of humans through force, fraud, or coercion for exploitation, including forced labor, sexual exploitation, or involuntary servitude. It is the foundational crime

underpinning modern slavery, recognized internationally under the Palermo Protocol (2000).

However, despite global efforts, traffickers often escape due to weak enforcement.

Modern slavery:

This is an umbrella term that covers forced labor, debt bondage, forced marriage, and human trafficking—situations where individuals cannot refuse or leave due to threats, violence, or deception. The ILO estimates that there are around 50 million victims worldwide as of 2022.

Forced labor:

Work performed involuntarily under threat, often in industries like agriculture, construction, and domestic work. It is deeply tied to everyday consumer products and corporations. According to the ILO, forced labor generated \$236 billion dollars as of 2022.

Debt bondage:

This occurs when victims are trapped in cycles of debt used to justify their exploitation, common in migrant labor and informal sectors. It is a pervasive form of modern slavery, particularly in South Asia and the Gulf.

Palermo Protocol (2000):

The first legally binding UN agreement defining human trafficking and mandating state action. While 178 countries have ratified it, inconsistent implementation and low prosecution reveals gaps in global accountability.

Supply chain accountability:

This is the concept that corporations and governments have a responsibility to ensure that their products do not use forced labor. The 2023 Global Slavery Index found that G20 nations import \$468 billion in forced-labor goods annually.

Transnational organized crime:

This refers to criminal networks operating across borders to traffic humans, often linked to drug and arms smuggling.

Public Private Partnerships (PPP):

Collaborations between governments, NGOs, and businesses to combat trafficking. Groups often use PPPs to disrupt trafficking economics effectively.

Demand reduction:

Strategies that target the root causes of trafficking including but not limited to: consumer demand for cheap labor and services. It is crucial to address demand for products closely associated with human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

Background

Human trafficking and modern slavery remain grave global challenges, affecting an estimated 40-50 million people worldwide in forms such as forced labor, debt bondage, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage (ILO). Under Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, UN Member States committed to take immediate and effective measures to end forced labour, modern slavery, and human trafficking by 2030, and the worst forms of child labour by 2025. To meet Target 8.7, the reduction of the number of people affected needs to go over 10000 people per day, it is an effort that requires global system-level change (United Nations University). Despite formal abolitions under international law, these crimes persist due to complex socioeconomic, political, and legal factors, and are often driven by poverty, conflict, gender inequality, and weak governance.

The international community has taken various significant steps to combat these crimes. Key implementations include the 2000 United Nations Palermo Protocol, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and Sustainable Development Goal 8.7, which calls for the elimination of forced labour and modern-day slavery by 2030. In addition, a variety of regional agreements and national laws seek to criminalize human trafficking and protect victims.

Nevertheless, human trafficking serves a variety of purposes. Prior to them is the process of recruitment, transportation or harbouring of persons for the purpose of exploitation, often by coercion, deception or force. It is a serious crime and a multibillion-dollar industry, often facilitated by organized crime networks operating across borders. In addition to that, conflict zones, poverty, lack of education and weak governance create a rampant environment for human traffickers to exploit vulnerable populations. On the other hand, modern slavery is an act of crime interlinked under human trafficking, yet distinct violations of human rights that persist globally despite widespread legal prohibitions. Enforcement remains inconsistent and many countries face challenges in identifying victims, prosecuting traffickers and providing adequate support to survivors. Technological advances have also enabled traffickers to utilize digital platforms for recruitment and abuse, further complicating efforts to track and prevent these crimes.

A coordinated international response, incorporating prevention strategies, victim-centered approaches, cross-border cooperation and stronger legal frameworks in addressing modern slavery and human trafficking, is required. Proposed solutions (See Possible Solutions) include strengthening legal frameworks with clearer definitions and harsher punishments under a prevention, protection, and prosecution approach. The establishment of a UN-monitored

international force is recommended to assist countries lacking capacity to combat trafficking. Additionally, increased economic support for low-GDP nations is suggested to address the root causes of vulnerability to exploitation.

Major Parties Involved

International Labour Organization (ILO)

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations, founded in 1919. Its core mission is to promote social justice and internationally recognized human and labor rights. The ILO brings together governments, employers, and workers from its 187 member states to set labor standards, develop policies, and devise programs that promote decent work for all. Some of its key contributions combatting human trafficking and modern slavery are the Forced Labour Convention (No. 29, 1930), Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105, 1957), and Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention. Each of these strengthened the legal frameworks over many countries and increased the awareness worldwide.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is the leading UN agency responsible for addressing human trafficking and modern slavery problems globally. It serves as the guardian of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol). Some important contributions the UNODC made serves under the fields of shaping international

policies, sets standards, and monitors the implementation of these legal frameworks. The UNODC also publishes the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, which provides comprehensive data and analysis on trafficking trends, patterns, and responses. This evidence base informs policy, highlights emerging threats (such as online trafficking), and identifies gaps in national and international responses (UNODC).

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

2000: Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol)

The first legally binding global treaty to define and address human trafficking, complementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. It sets out measures for prevention, prosecution and protection of victims. While 178 countries have ratified it, inconsistent implementation and low prosecution reveals gaps in global accountability.

International Labour Organization (ILO) Protocols

The ILO adopted the Forced Labour Convention (1930, No. 29), the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (1957, No. 105), and the 2014 Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention. These instruments address forced labor and modern forms of slavery and require states to take preventive and protective measures (ILO).

Integration into Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The eradication of forced labor, modern slavery, and human trafficking was specifically targeted under SDG Target 8.7 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ILO).

Possible Solutions

More specific legal frameworks established

Deploy harsher punishments towards human trafficker with the “three prolonged approaches of prevention, protection, and prosecution”. There are many current laws which was developed for this issue including but not limited to; Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000), TVPA Reauthorization Act (2003), TVPA Reauthorization Act (2005), TVPA Reauthorization Act (2008), TVPA Reauthorization Act (2013).

Along with better definitions and more specific punishments accordingly. For example, voluntary servitude (to threaten a person to believe that they would be harmed if not committed to a certain action), debt bondage (where the debt collector would require the victim's personal service of many different kinds using force), Coercion (threats of physical harm for a person).

Create an international force

Many human trafficking issues exist in individual countries where legal frameworks are not developed and there are not enough resources for the state to confront this issue. We would suggest an international force monitored and funded by the United Nations where regular inspections would take place with these organizations as well as limit criminal activities that the state, through many cases, could not, within their abilities, control.

More Economical Support through states with higher number of human trafficking

Research shows that the lower the state's GDP, the numbers of human trafficking cases are higher (of course with few expectations). One of the key causes of human trafficking is the fact that people are not managing to be payed enough by normal jobs in order to maintain normal living expense. Providing more programs with the aim of providing economical aid to solve the issue's roots.

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