



STATEMENT OF THE
PERMANENT MISSION OF THE HOLY SEE
TO THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN VIENNA

UNODC WG on Human Trafficking

12-13 October 2021, Vienna

Mr./Madam Chair,

I would like to use this opportunity to highlight the concerning intersection between Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and human trafficking, and especially the way in which the internet continues to be used to perpetrate this heinous crime, which has increased significantly in the last year.

During the anti-COVID restrictions, cases of sexual and labour exploitation have grown so drastically that human trafficking became the second most profitable criminal activity worldwide, pushing the illegal trafficking of weapons into third place.

Quarantine measures have forced people to stay home. As a result, the use of web resources has accelerated as a preferred means not only for food delivery and e-commerce, but also for the recruitment and exploitation of victims, as perpetrators have taken advantage of the situation caused by the pandemic to make their criminal activity even harder to track and prosecute. Even while law enforcement agencies have become better at controlling exploitation, online recruitment and abuse are quickly becoming the most common way to entrap new victims.

The Delegation of the Holy See reiterates the Holy Father's deep concern for the victims of trafficking, made more vulnerable by the pandemic, and his invitation to fight this abominable crime in all its forms¹. For this reason, the Holy See invites all political and social actors to make greater efforts to ensure that digital platforms cannot be used as a tool by human traffickers to lure, ensnare and exploit victims.

¹ Cf. Pope Francis, Message to participants in the Conference on Human Trafficking organized by the "Santa Marta Group", Madrid, 30-31 October 2015.

As a concrete measure, the Holy See Delegation expresses its hope for the establishment of a mechanism at the international level to assist States in identifying and reporting irregularities and the criminal use of social media and other communication tools for human trafficking.

Governments should also adopt policies and regulations aimed at combating the criminal use of digital platforms for trafficking, and encourage its positive use in favour of the integral human development. These policies and regulations should be matched by effective surveillance of the criminal use of such platforms and a concrete commitment to prosecuting the perpetrators.

Lastly, Governments and international authorities should work together to pursue and endorse financial investigations for the operations of presumed criminal organizations in order to identify trafficking and confiscate the financial gains obtained through the criminal use of digital platforms. Confiscated assets could be made available to programs for victims of trafficking. The same could be done with penalties levied on irresponsible service providers.

Thank you Mr./Madam Chair.