



HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN CONFLICT ZONES

Armed conflict amplifies the risks of human trafficking for vulnerable populations by increasing economic desperation, weakening rule of law, decreasing the availability of social services, and forcing people to flee for their safety. Armed conflict often results in broken governments, judicial systems, job markets, and community support structures that would normally offer citizens protection from disasters and crime, including human trafficking. Many contributing factors, such as high unemployment rates, homelessness, limited social services, and weak law enforcement oversight, are amplified in conflict zones and exploited by traffickers. Without formal options and services to maintain their livelihoods, people are more likely to resort to illicit activities or risky, informal means to survive—sectors in which traffickers thrive.

During armed conflicts, governments divert existing resources to respond to the imminent crisis with a resulting loss in facilities and personnel for peacetime governmental services. This exacerbates existing limitations and creates new gaps in a government's structures to protect and provide for its citizens. Some militias use human trafficking to generate income and obtain new combatants. Young women and girls are often forced to marry or have sex with commanders and male combatants. The national and civil disorder caused by such conflict make traffickers' recruitment tactics—including false offers of jobs, shelter, or education—more enticing to vulnerable populations.

Armed conflict can break down government institutions and create a climate of impunity that encourages traffickers to prey on vulnerable populations. Women and children, migrants, and internally displaced persons are among those most at risk of being subjected to trafficking in conflict zones. The terrorist organization Boko Haram, for example, has abducted and forced women and children into sexual slavery in Nigeria, and the Somali National Army continues to recruit children into combat.

Camps for refugees and internally displaced persons are prime targets for traffickers. The concentration of vulnerable, displaced people, combined with a lack of security, services, and oversight typically found in such camps, make them ideal locations for traffickers to operate. In long-standing camps, traffickers are able to build relationships with corrupt camp officials and establish trafficking rings.

Human trafficking is frequently overlooked in crises and omitted from formulations of humanitarian and emergency response policies. Trafficking operations can flourish amidst international reconstruction efforts where there are few government institutions or rule of law. The international community and individual countries must recognize labor and sex trafficking as a common occurrence during conflict and include anti-trafficking strategies in humanitarian responses.



© International Labour Organization/Marcel Crozet

THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL ADDRESSES HUMAN TRAFFICKING

“The Islamic State didn’t come to kill the women and girls, but to use us as spoils of war, as objects to be sold . . . or to be gifted for free,” said Nadia Murad Basee Taha, a Yezidi survivor of human trafficking. Her powerful first-hand testimony on December 16, 2015, moved all those present at the United Nations Security Council’s (UNSC) first session to address human trafficking. Ms. Murad urged the Council to recognize the actions of Da’esh as genocide, to “find a way to open a case before the International Criminal Court,” to rescue the thousands of Yezidi women and children held in captivity, to provide a safe haven for Yezidis and other threatened minority groups, and to establish an international victims compensation fund.

The UNSC’s Presidential Statement condemned the actions of Da’esh, called for states to hold accountable those who engage in trafficking, and expressed solidarity with the victims, including in situations of conflict. The UNSC urged all relevant UN agencies operating in conflict and post-conflict situations to assess instances of human trafficking, proactively screen for potential trafficking victims, and facilitate their access to services.

Since her brave testimony before the UNSC, Nadia has become a clear voice in her community and on behalf of victims of human trafficking in conflict situations around the world.

