

33rd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council – 13-30 September 2016

Item 3 – Clustered ID with the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences

Joint oral statement

Title: Debt bondage is a real form of slavery

APG23 and the co-signing NGOs welcome the Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences¹.

Debt bondage is a real form of slavery and also an intergenerational and intra-generational form of slavery that affects all the marginalized groups. It is an unacceptable practice that violates the human dignity of a person in the name of money and profit.

Slavery is prohibited in international human rights law. The International Bill of Human Rights², condemns slavery very clearly.

We hope that the achievement of SDG 8.7³ of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda will greatly contribute to combat this phenomenon. All the UN Member States have now a new imperative.

Debt bondage and bonded labour exist across countries for different causes, especially because of the persistence of poverty, widespread discrimination, harmful traditions, gender inequality, illiteracy that make large groups of people vulnerable to exploitation.

This is particularly true for the women that are on the streets for prostitution and subjected to sexual exploitation. Through our experience in the field we can testify that almost the totality of women on the street, exploited for sexual reasons, are under debt bondage. The practice is often connected with the migration trip. Young women, especially coming from Africa and Asia, fall into debt to pay the traffickers and the exploiters control them even with different and brutal forms of violence, keeping these women in a continuous state of poverty and indebtedness.

This commercialization of women is profoundly unjust and constitutes a great violation of their dignity. As Pope Francis repeatedly said: “it is a crime against humanity”.

For all these reasons we support the S.R. recommendations to Member States asking for strong efforts to combat the slavery practice of debt bondage.

Finally, we recommend the creation at national level of a fund in favour of the victims of debt bondage by using the money taken away from the condemned exploiters. Such a national fund could work as the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery⁴.

Thank you!

¹ A/HRC/33/46

² UDHR articles 4, 23 and 24; ICCPR article 8; ICESCR articles 6 and 7.

³ SDG 8.7 “to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms”

⁴ See APG23 written statement A/HRC/33/NGO/X