

IPU and United Nations join forces to combat trafficking in persons, a form of modern-day slavery

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The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) today launched *Combating Trafficking in Persons: A Handbook for Parliamentarians* at the 120th IPU Assembly in Addis Ababa. Trafficking in persons is a form of modern-day slavery, a human rights violation that constitutes a crime against the individual and the State. It must be recognized and punished by legislative means.

Two hundred years ago, British parliamentarian William Wilberforce and a group of campaigners changed the public perception of slavery and overcame strong resistance to push through legislation that brought about the end of the transatlantic slave trade. “Despite the achievements of those 19th-century abolitionists”, said IPU President Theo-Ben Gurirab, “slavery remains very much with us today”.

“Around the world, millions of people, usually women and children, are trapped in a modern form of slavery called human trafficking: 21st-century abolitionists are now needed to enact laws and take measures to set victims of trafficking free and stamp out a crime that shames us all”, added the UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa. “Parliaments and parliamentarians have the power to prevent human trafficking by raising awareness and curbing exploitative practices”.

“Legislators can adopt the laws needed to prosecute traffickers and protect the rights of victims; they can also take steps to combat the crime of human trafficking at international level”, emphasised IPU President Gurirab.

The IPU-UNODC handbook is intended to encourage parliamentarians to take an active part in stopping human trafficking. It contains a compilation of international laws and good practices developed to combat human trafficking, and offers guidance on how national legislation can be brought in line with international standards by, for example, defining trafficking in persons and criminalizing all its forms. It outlines measures to prevent commission of the crime, to prosecute offenders and to protect victims. It also contains advice on how to report on human trafficking and how to enlist civil society in the cause.

As public awareness of human trafficking grows, people are demanding that action be taken to end it. As their elected representatives, parliamentarians have a responsibility and the power to ensure that laws and other measures are put in place and implemented to that end. The *Handbook* is intended to inspire them to enact sound laws and adopt good practices that will strengthen national responses to human trafficking.

Established in 1889 and with Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, the IPU - the oldest multilateral political organization in the world - currently brings together 154 parliaments and eight associated regional assemblies. The world organization of parliaments also has an Office in New York, which acts as its Permanent Observer to the United Nations.

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