

STOLEN DREAMS

YOUTH-LED ANTI-SLAVERY COLLECTIVE

THE
YOUTH FOR FREEDOM
COLLECTIVE

1 July 2022

**UN Office on Drugs and Crime Constructive Dialogue on Trafficking in Persons:
Criminalisation and Jurisdiction - Youth Statement**

Thank you for the floor, Madam Co-Chair, and to UNODC for convening this important Dialogue.

Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Colleagues,

My name is Ishaan Shah, I am 19-years-old and the Founder of Stolen Dreams, an international youth-led organization working to counter transnational organized crime, especially trafficking in persons. I am also a National Gender Youth Advocate supported by UN Women and the Youth Focal Point for the Stakeholder Engagement Programme implemented by UNODC.

Despite the crucial need for protection, survivors of trafficking in persons continue to be criminalized and punished. Even children, who are severely impacted by and vulnerable to trafficking in persons, by virtue of their age alone, are receiving weak protections.

States must commit to a human-rights-based criminal justice approach, going beyond the full and effective implementation of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, to ensure that survivors are treated with dignity, and for their fundamental human rights to be protected.

This means survivors must not be criminalized nor threatened with detention, deportation, or other forms of punishment for crimes committed during their period of exploitation, or as a direct result or consequence of their exploitation, such as breaches of laws, immigration procedures, possession and use of forged official documents, or drug offenses, to name a few. Furthermore, survivors must be provided with the relevant humanitarian, legal and financial support through established channels of assistance.

To fulfill these aims and to realize the full potential of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, all stakeholders must center the meaningful participation of survivors, acknowledging the need to incorporate their perspective, expertise and experiences in all efforts.

Furthermore, being one of the few youth present, and the youngest person in the room, highlights the disconnect between youth and efforts to counter trafficking in persons. We call on stakeholders to commit and follow through on promoting the full, effective, and meaningful engagement, participation and inclusion of youth, including youth with lived experiences, in all efforts and decision-making to counter trafficking in persons, as co-leaders, co-creators, and co-owners, through:

- Educational, community-based programmes targeted at ensuring children are aware of their rights,
- partnerships with civil society organizations,
- engaging youth in the National Review processes,
- including youth in Member State delegations,
- expanding the Stakeholder Engagement Programme,
- and establishing a formal, independent, and transparent youth-led advisory body on the Review and Implementation of the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols thereto, to UNODC.

As youth, we hold a unique and profound power to facilitate concrete, comprehensive and transformative progress, and we look forward to supporting Member States, UNODC and all participating stakeholders, as experts in our own lived realities and as valued and equal partners at the decision making table, across all efforts to truly counter trafficking in persons in all its forms.

Thank you.

END