

Eva Biaudet, Member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues, addressing the Forum under the discussion on violence against indigenous women and girls (10.5)

- During this year's session urgent attention is paid to the important topic of violence against indigenous women and girls. This was also the topic of the Expert Group Meeting which convened in January this year. Likewise, members of the Permanent Forum – myself included – have been working on a study on the extent of violence against indigenous women and girls which will be finalized and presented in 2013. I would here like to raise the issue of trafficking in women and girls, which is the most severe form of exploitation and violence. Trafficking for sexual exploitation is about torture, it is about multiple rape, it is severely traumatizing and de-humanizing. It breaks the spirit of women and can isolate indigenous women from their cultures and communities if they are not assisted and protected in a respectful way.
- As the former OSCE special representative for combating trafficking in human beings and the current national rapporteur on trafficking in human beings in Finland, I have had the opportunity to work with this issue both internationally and nationally.
- Violence against women and particularly sexual violence and human trafficking is the worst form of exploitation of women. It is severely traumatizing and shameful for the victims and it is therefore particularly complex when it happens in small communities. Trafficking in human beings can be about organized crime, but the trafficker and those who facilitate it can too often be relatives, even parents or other persons the victim has trusted.
- A sense of shame experienced by victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking makes it difficult for women to denounce their exploiters or their traffickers. It is important for us to see that human trafficking is not essentially about transportation. It is about abuse of someone's vulnerable position for the purpose of profit. Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately affected and, as the expert group meeting report tells us, chronically underreported.
- The vulnerability or the vulnerable position can be a consequence of discrimination, of migration or, at its worst, of emotional bonds to the exploiter. Women and children seem to have an extremely strong sense of loyalty which perpetrators take advantage of.
- While the root causes of vulnerability can stem from different causes, addressing this expanding phenomenon of vulnerability must happen on many parallel levels. Protecting victims and preventing this crime is an immediate priority.

- Women and children as victims of sexual violence and trafficking for sexual purposes seem to endure terrible violence and de-humanizing treatment and yet they do not always recognize that they are victims of human trafficking, which is a crime against their human rights.
- Human trafficking and sexual violence against women and children exists in all countries, also within indigenous communities. To empower the victims to denounce their exploiters and prevent human trafficking and related serious exploitation it is essential to create mechanisms of intervention and of accountability that do not depend solely on the victims to act.
- Authorities such as law enforcement, the police and prosecutors need to work together with NGO's who work on combating violence against indigenous women and girls, creating assistance systems that truly are empowering.
- In this work, it is meaningful to cooperate with international and national organizations that are experts on violence against women and trafficking in human beings. This is because the biggest challenge fighting human trafficking, still is the difficulty to identify victims as victims of human trafficking. Too often, actions against human trafficking are directed only at informing presumable victims. Too rarely, actions are taken to improve equality between women and men, against discrimination of indigenous women and girls or against the expanding demand of prostitution and sexual exploitation.
- Human trafficking looks the same everywhere. The modes of operation for criminals are the same, the ways of controlling victims and abusing the vulnerability of the victims are the same, and the difficulties for the authorities to identify the crime are the same.
- Trafficking is a human rights crime by itself. Additionally, it is discriminatory by character, towards women and children, towards minorities and indigenous peoples.
- International experience shows the importance for states to ratify the main international legal instruments such as The UNTOC convention and its Palermo protocol. But to make these legal instruments functional it is necessary to implement them fully and put mechanisms in place that have demonstrated their effectiveness.

- Every state therefore needs a national action plan on implementation coordinating the work of authorities with civil society, giving particular attention to indigenous women and children. Additionally, the National Rapporteur mechanism, a self reporting mechanism gathering and analyzing information from different stakeholders, also disaggregating data, has proven to improve government responses to protect victims, to prosecute the perpetrators and prevent human trafficking and related exploitation.
- An independent National Rapporteur systematically reporting to parliament can also put the fight against human trafficking on the political agenda.
- For protecting children and youth against sexual violence and trafficking in human beings, the convention on the rights of the child and the principle of prioritizing the child's best interest is essential. A study done recently in the Nordic countries by UNICEF showed that even when advanced mechanisms against trafficking in human beings exist, the focus on children and evaluating their best interests in every step of the response must be primary, also when protecting children from violence and trafficking in human beings.