

COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE SADC MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION ON COMBATING TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS, ESPECIALLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE SADC REGION HELD ON 28TH OF MAY 2009

The SADC Ministers responsible for combating trafficking in persons, the African Union, international cooperating partners namely United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations Children's Fund, International Organisation for Migration, the European Commission, and civil society organizations met in Maputo, Mozambique to develop a Strategic Plan of Action on Combating Trafficking in Persons in the SADC Region.

The Conference was officially opened by Honourable Jose O. Pacheco Minister of Home Affairs of the Republic of Mozambique representing His Excellency Armando Emilio Guebuza, the President of the Republic of Mozambique. The following Member States were represented at the Conference: The Republic of Angola, Republic of Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kingdom of Lesotho, Republic of Malawi, Republic of Mauritius, Republic of Mozambique, Republic of Namibia, Republic of South Africa, Kingdom of Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Republic of Zambia, and Republic of Zimbabwe. SADC Secretariat was represented by the Executive Secretary.

The African Union (AU), European Union (EU), International Organization on Migration (IOM), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and Southern African Network Against Trafficking of Children (SANTAC) and other civil society organizations provided technical support.

Delegates at the conference noted that the phenomenon of trafficking in persons, especially women and children is growing in the SADC Region. This represents a new, sophisticated and aggressive form of slavery. Trafficking in persons is a criminal activity that requires clear and comprehensive legislation to prevent and combat. Furthermore, there is a need for programmes and legislation to protect and assist victims of such trafficking, with full respect for their human rights, and to promote cooperation among all stakeholders in order to address this problem.

People in the SADC Region are more prone to trafficking as a result of vulnerabilities created by war, endemic poverty, minimal access to health and education, gender inequality, unemployment, which mainly affects children particularly orphans, youth and women who comprise the majority of the poor.

The Conference deliberated on challenges of combating trafficking in persons, especially women and children in the SADC Region, reviewed and adopted the Draft Strategic Plan of Action on Combating Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children in the SADC Region.

The Regional Plan of Action clearly lays out methods and areas of cooperation to combat all areas of human trafficking, especially of women and children. The regional plan of action addresses trafficking from a comprehensive perspective, as outlined in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Ouagadougou Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children of the African Union, and the Protocol on Gender and Development of SADC. In particular, the Plan of Action seeks to address the following priority areas in line with these

legal instruments:

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(a) legislation and policy measures, which involves encouraging Member States to ratify and implement the UNTOC, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development; as well as the development of national policies, and the enactment of legislation to combat trafficking in persons;

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(b) training for skills enhancement and capacity building, which entails facilitating specialised regional training of national cadres for law enforcement personnel, customs and immigration officials, social workers, prosecutors and judges, civil society organisations and the private sectors in the investigation, prevention and prosecution of trafficking in persons, and the protection of the trafficked victims, especially women and children;

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(c) prevention and public awareness raising that covers provision of support to Member States in partnership with international organizations, Non-Governmental Organisations and other Civil Society Sector, Public and Private Sector/Media to develop and disseminate regional public awareness materials on trafficking in persons, particularly vulnerable women and children;

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(d) victim support and witness protection, which deals with, among others, provision of technical support to Member States to establish or strengthen mechanisms in the relevant sectors for support of victims and protection of witnesses and those who report cases of trafficking in persons;

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(e) coordination and regional cooperation, which covers enhancing cooperation and collaboration between Member States and all other regional, continental and international stakeholders in combating trafficking in persons;

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(f) research and information sharing, which deals with carrying out research to establish levels, trends and patterns of trafficking in persons in the Region, that is, the development of Regional Management Information Systems (MIS);

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(g) monitoring and evaluation on the implementation of the Plan of Action at regional and national levels;

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(h) mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Plan of Action.

The ten-year Regional Strategic Plan of Action was adopted by SADC Ministers responsible for combating trafficking in persons and will be submitted to SADC Council of Ministers for approval in August, 2009.

The Conference commended the Government of the Republic of Mozambique for hosting the meeting.

The Conference further commended the European Commission for financial support.