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## Human Rights Council

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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2019]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## **Addressing tomorrow's slavery today: Human trafficking and modern slavery in Vanuatu**

### **A case study: 102 Bangladeshi men trafficked to Vanuatu**

Between the period of April 2017 and September 2018, 102 men, including 2 minors, were trafficked to Port Vila, the capital town of Vanuatu, purposely for economic remittances as promised by a trafficker, who is believed to be involved in a global major network of human trafficking and slavery. The 102 men were trafficked from Tangail and Borisal districts in Bangladesh where the trafficker is also from. The trafficker also holds a Zimbabwean passport, while his Indian wife holds a Mauritian passport. The recruitment of the 102 men was supported by the trafficker's close relatives who collected from each of the men around \$15,000 - \$30,000 USD purposely to either work with him in a business in Port Vila or to set up a business in his market vendor.

Besides being trafficked, they were also forced to launder money to Vanuatu through immigration and customs of cash value of up to from \$8,000-10,000 USD. While in Vanuatu, the men were badly treated, they were beaten and threatened with harm or death. They were underfed and made to work hard in extreme conditions. This went on for over a year until the 27 October 2018, when three of the victims escaped and reported to the local police. The trafficker, who is currently in jail awaiting trial, has made two excuses: first, that he wanted a translator; secondly, he wanted an international lawyer. The judge advised him to use a local lawyer first.

In this case, the Government of Vanuatu is supporting with accommodation, electricity, and water, while the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is assisting with food and other domestic supplies such as toiletries. Large number of communities are supporting with food and other basic needs such as drinking water and clothes. The Government of New Zealand has supported with a water tank and food supplies. Through the strong advocacy of the Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, 75 of the refugees have been voluntarily repatriated by IOM, while 25 of them have been asked by the Public Prosecutor to remain in Vanuatu to stand witness the trial. One of the victims refused to return home for security reasons.

#### **Current solutions on this case:**

- Private investigator hired by the Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition to track the trafficker's assets and verifying the real nature of his business. This report will be made available to the police, immigration, and IOM.
- The Government playing its humanitarian duty to ensure the victims are provided the basic needs of survival such as food, health care and medical treatment, electricity, water and the freedom to move around freely without walls nor fences.
- Communities taking the responsibility to care and feed the victims with good nutritious home – grown vegetables and fruits.
- Private telecommunication companies i.e. TVL and Digicel providing internet services to enable them to communicate with their families back home.
- IOM assisting in voluntary safe return and continue food and basic needs such as blankets, foot wear and toiletries.
- Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition providing public campaign and awareness on the Rights of the refugees as well as communicating with Bangladesh Embassy in Canberra on their behalf.

## Addressing tomorrow's slavery today through strong partnerships

'Sharing responsibility for refugees more equitably between countries of the global North and South is a matter of urgency'. Some 84 percent of refugees live in the global South, where they face a complex web of economic, social, and political insecurities. Each year, large numbers of them embark on perilous journeys to the North in search of security. Meanwhile, countries in the global North have been making every effort to keep uninvited refugees and migrants out. A fairer system is possible, but it will require economic policy changes in both hemispheres. In the global South, this includes giving refugees the right to work and access to education. In the richer countries of the North, the main obstacle to effective, sustainable refugee protection is the public's economic, cultural and political anxieties.

Vanuatu's current management of this biggest-ever human trafficking in the Pacific is telling the rest of the world that human trafficking and modern slavery cannot be handled alone by a State or one State, but that responsibilities must be shared by everyone because this is a global issue. The ACP/EU global compact on migration provides the first international cooperative framework on migration; though it is not legally binding, it aims to foster international cooperation in tackling a global challenge. The world leaders at the U.N. General Assembly in 2016 lined up with promises to address these root causes through a hard and soft dual-policy approach. Another statement made by Federica Mogherini highlighted: *"Through partnerships, we are showing that managing migration in a humane way is possible, together."* EU has set an example by funding safe return of thousands of refugees like the Libyan refugees.

## Digging into the root causes of migration and enforcing better care and management

First, as countries get richer, there is more opportunity and security at home. That tends to deter migration. However, as poor countries get richer, they often go through a demographic transition – child mortality rates falling before fertility rates do – which brings a youth wave into the labour force, tending to raise migration. As poor countries get richer, more people invest in education, which gives them both the tools and aspirations to migrate, tending to raise emigration, and more people have the disposable income to invest in migration. This second group of forces, and others, tends to overwhelm the first group at low levels of development, so that the forces raising emigration win out. At higher levels of development, the deterring effect wins out.

In the Pacific region where climate-induced migration is expected to rise in the coming years, this dialogue is essential to plan ahead strategically, identify local and national partners who will ensure that climate refugees, amongst other development-related migrants, are supported by all systems such as States, Provinces, Districts, NGOs, Churches and other traditional leaders such as the village chiefs. These stakeholders must to come together to continue to tackle human trafficking and modern slavery issues. The statement urges that countries of the South be technically and financially empowered so that their traditional systems can better contribute to quality prevention and protection against slavery in the future.

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Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.