



## Slavery remains unresolved, Ban says in call for greater efforts to defeat scourge



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2 December 2009 – Contemporary forms of slavery remain a “grave” and unresolved problem across all continents, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned today as he called for greater efforts to address poverty and social inequalities which leave people vulnerable to enslavement.

In message marking the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, observed annually on 2 December, Mr. Ban said that the list of new and old forms of slavery is “shockingly long.”

That list includes debt bondage, serfdom, forced labour, child labour and servitude, trafficking of persons and human organs, sexual slavery, forced marriage, the exploitation of prostitutes and the use of child soldiers among others.

“The majority who suffer are the poor and socially excluded groups such as minorities and migrants,” said Mr. Ban. “The overlapping factors of poverty, class and race create structural problems and cycles of marginalization that are hard to break.”

The Secretary-General noted that gender inequalities, lack of education, desperation for work and demand for cheap labour also trap people in a life of subjugation, a vulnerability the global economic and financial crises threaten to heighten.

“Combating slavery means not only its direct prohibition by law but also fighting against poverty, illiteracy, economic and social disparities, gender discrimination and violence against women and children,” stressed Mr. Ban.

The independent United Nations expert on contemporary forms of slavery noted that domestic workers “who are overworked, underpaid and subject to abuse – whether physical, emotional or sexual in nature – are effectively being treated as slaves.”

Gulnara Shahinian, the UN Special Rapporteur for the issue, stressed that this form of slavery takes place all over the world, in her message marking the Day.

“Domestic workers are beaten, raped, forced into confinement, denied food and contact with others,” said Ms. Shahinian. “Despite working in these inhumane conditions, they are often trapped due to a lack of information or opportunity to seek help, as well as by financial pressures and debts.”

She said that migrant workers are especially vulnerable because of their insecure legal status and domestic service is often used as a pretext to lure women and girls abroad, deceiving them of the real nature of the work.

The UN Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery – established in part to assist humanitarian, legal and financial aid to victims of such violations – said that the Day should serve as a reminder that slavery is not a “thing of the past.”

In its message commemorating the Day, the Board of Trustees appealed to all UN Member States to meet their obligations to abolish and eradicate slavery in all its forms, and urged States to ratify existing treaties with the same aim – including the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.

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