

**THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
AND THE 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
(NOVEMBER 25-DECEMBER 10)**

THE COMMITTEE TO STOP TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS STATEMENT

On [International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#) (Nov. 25) and during the next [16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence](#), the Committee to Stop Trafficking in Persons, NGO CSTIP, is calling special attention to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. We join the United Nations Secretary General's [UNiTE to end Violence against Women campaign's call to "Leave No One Behind: End Violence against Women and Girls."](#) As groups raise awareness about the pandemic of gender-based violence affecting 1 in 3 women in their lifetime, we cannot forget that sex trafficking is one of the most deplorable forms of violence against women and a crime that targets the most marginalized among us. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, women and girls make up 71% of all detected trafficking victims and 96% of all sex trafficking victims. Further, women and girls trafficked for forced labor also frequently face sexual violence and exploitation. No matter how you look at the issue, women and girls are disproportionately vulnerable to sex trafficking and sexual exploitation.

In the fall of 2015, global leaders at the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which established guidelines for member countries to stimulate prosperity, promote human rights and protect the planet. The resulting 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets continue to cement the UN's commitments to its founding principles. Each is distinct in scope and equal in importance; all are vital components in addressing the world's challenges.

Three SDG targets — 5.2, 8.7, and 16.2 — address specific forms of trafficking in persons. Other targets also focus on root causes that contribute to the spread of human trafficking. SDG 5 on gender equality and its target 5.2 on violence against women, in particular, recognizes that the trafficking of women and girls, especially for the purposes of sexual exploitation, is an issue of gender-based discrimination and violence against women. Many of the other targets under Goal 5 also connect to the issue of trafficking, such as the elimination of child marriage, the need to value domestic and unpaid labor and the creation of policies to promote gender equality at all levels of society. Gender-based discrimination and violence is a clear cause and consequence of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation and needs to be addressed as part of comprehensive efforts to end human trafficking and achieve sustainable development.

The preamble to the 2030 Agenda pledges “that no one will be left behind.” Human trafficking, particularly trafficking of women and girls, preys on the most vulnerable and marginalized — those most likely to *be* left behind. These women and girls are mostly of color, poor, homeless, of low socio-economic class or caste, who have suffered sexual abuse and violence, often at a young age, and lack choices and alternatives to survive. Apne Aap president and founder Ruchira Gupta calls her the Last Girl. Sex traffickers abuse their power and take advantage of the Last Girl's vulnerabilities to sell her to men who buy her for prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation, causing her life-long trauma and harm. If we hope to leave no one behind, society must take a firm stand to ensure that she will be given the chance to fulfil her potential and achieve her dreams.

Therefore, it is crucial for governments to enact policies that will protect marginalized women and girls, and give them opportunities to survive and thrive. States must seek to end the unprecedented levels of gender-based violence. It begins with the creation of educational programs that promote gender equality, emphasizing the harms of gender stereotypes, sexual exploitation, sexual violence and the objectification of women and girls. Due to systemic inequality, women are consistently discriminated against in the job market. Ending employment and wage discrimination and providing women and girls with educational

options and vocational training is vital. So too is ensuring that women and girls have access to a social safety net, including social services, that will help alleviate vulnerabilities particular to them.

States must also make a concerted effort to end the demand for prostitution that sustains the sex trade, fueling sex trafficking. Legislators must enact laws that will decriminalize women and girls exploited in the sex trade and instead give them access to services that will help them rebuild their lives. It is imperative that these services for victims and survivors of domestic and international trafficking are adequately funded and supported. Simultaneously, laws must also penalize traffickers, pimps, sex buyers, and other exploiters to hold them accountable for the harms they have caused.

The UN envisioned the SDGs as an integrated and holistic endeavor. Our efforts to end human trafficking require the same attention — a global solution that must engage actors across sectors and borders. In order to leave no one behind, these multi-stakeholders should never abandon the needs of those who are so often forgotten. As we “orange the world” during these 16 Days of Activism, we must not forget the Last Girl.