



Statement by the United Nations Resident Coordinator for Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau, Mr. Themba Kalua

**Dissemination Workshop/Training on Trafficking in Persons
19-21 November 2024, Le Lava Hotel Conference Room**

- CEOs and representative of government ministries
- Members of the Diplomatic Corp
- Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency
- Private sector representatives
- Representatives of Civil Society organisations
- My dear UN colleagues
- Ladies and gentlemen

Talofa lava. Malo le soifua manuia

It is a privilege to address you today at this important workshop on combating Trafficking in Persons (TIP). Trafficking in Persons is not only a serious crime but also a grave violation of human rights, affecting millions worldwide. Each year, countless men, women, and children fall victim to traffickers, often within their own countries, but also across borders. Unfortunately, no country is immune to this crime—and Samoa is no exception.

Globally, over 50 million people are trapped in situations of modern slavery, according to the latest estimates. The Pacific, with its vast blue largely unmonitored borders, geographic isolation, and economic challenges, faces unique vulnerabilities. Industries such as fishing, where isolation compounds the risks, are particularly susceptible.

In the Pacific Islands, trafficking manifests in many forms. The region is a destination of trafficking in persons, and it also serves as a recruitment ground and transit route for trafficking in person flows to Oceania and Southeast Asia. Victims are exploited for sexual exploitation and forced labor in fishing, hospitality, domestic work, and agriculture.

The COVID-19 pandemic briefly disrupted trafficking. The total number of victims of trafficking monitored by UNODC declined for the first time in 20 years, largely due to restricted movement during the pandemic. However, as borders reopened and as traffickers exploit the economic vulnerabilities created by



pandemic, the risks of human trafficking—both domestic and transnational—are on the rise.

Why does this matter to Samoa? Cross-border movements have returned to pre-pandemic levels, with nearly 490,000 recorded in 2023. The number of fishing vessels operating in and near Samoa's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is rising, as is the transit of foreign ships through Samoa's waters. At the same time, the increase in Samoan seasonal workers migrating abroad introduces new risks. Many of these workers, seeking better opportunities, may unknowingly become victims of trafficking under the guise of legitimate labor recruitment. These factors underscore Samoa's growing vulnerabilities to trafficking in persons and the urgent need for robust preventive measures.

Against this backdrop, the **Country Assessment on Trafficking in Persons** is both timely and essential. Today's presentation and discussions will shed light on Samoa's current capacities, identify areas for improvement, and provide an actionable roadmap to strengthen Samoa's TIP prevention framework.

Addressing TIP requires a collaborative approach. It is a complex crime, often hidden in plain sight, demanding multi-sectoral partnerships. This session unites representatives from the government, fisheries, labor, law enforcement, maritime safety, civil society, private sector and development partners—all crucial players in this fight. I would like to say Fa'afetai for your commitment to addressing this challenge.

The United Nations in Samoa is committed to supporting the Government of Samoa in combating TIP. Our efforts align with international frameworks, including the **UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons** and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly:

- **Goal 5:** Gender Equality,
- **Goal 8:** Decent Work, and
- **Goal 16:** Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.

Our efforts are also aligned with the **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration**, which emphasizes addressing TIP in migration contexts. In



the Pacific, the **UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework** prioritizes strengthening institutions to enhance access to justice, uphold the rule of law, and protect human rights—particularly for those vulnerable to or affected by trafficking.

I would like to acknowledge the critical contributions of the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)**, **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, **UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**, and the **Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA)**. Together, with the generous support of New Zealand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the regional project “**Labour Standards on Fishing Vessels**” has become a cornerstone of our efforts to ensure safe and dignified working conditions across the Pacific.

As we engage in today’s discussions and capacity-building efforts over the coming days, let us remember that our collective commitment to addressing TIP is not merely about tackling a crime—it is about safeguarding human dignity, protecting fundamental human rights, and building a future where exploitation has no place.

Thank you once again for your commitment to this cause. I look forward to the insights and outcomes of this workshop.

Fa’afetai tele lava.