



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

KEY NOTE SPEECH

BY

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ON

**RESTORING HOPE IN AFRICA: A JUBILEE CALL TO
END HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

SATURDAY 8TH FEBRUARY, 2025



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Religious leaders in your respective capacities,

Leaders of the Civil Society Organizations,

Distinguished dignitaries attending physically and listening on television and online around the world,

Guest speakers of today's event,

Members of the public,

Ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to express special thanks to Prof. Dr. Rev. Sr. Leonida Katunge for requesting me to deliver this key note speech today.

It is both an honour, privilege and a solemn responsibility to address you today, on one of the most pressing human rights violations of our time – human trafficking — I am of the view that it should be called by its correct name—modern-day slavery.

Our theme for this year is: **Restoring hope in Africa: A jubilee call to end human trafficking.**

This issue cuts across borders, cultures, and economic systems and sadly, many countries across the world have crossed into legislation gaining normalcy in the name of labour export. This should concern all of us!



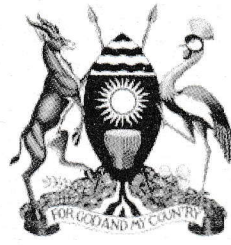
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When the legal export of labour operates side by side with the underground illegal trafficking of humans while at the same time, hundreds of thousands of desperate young men and women trying to escape poverty, wars and disease fall into the hands of traffickers, slave traders or die of exhaustion in deserts, or are devoured in jungles or drown at sea whether that be in North Africa and the Mediterranean Sea or the jungles of South America, an uncanny normalcy is created. It goes unseen or is ignored, yet it remains an ever-growing stain on our collective humanity.

I call it a stain on our collective humanity because human trafficking does not only in-dignify its victims, it equally indignifies those who exploit them, it indignifies those whose responsibility it is to protect them, it indignifies those who watch it happen but are aloof or chose to play blind, deaf and dumb about it.

As we gather here today 8th February in our cities across all continents, I want to emphasize that human trafficking is not just an issue for one nation, one region, or one community. It is a global crisis, one that demands a unified, multinational response.

I want to thank PACTPAN and its leadership and all of you attending this event both here in Uganda and the thousands joining us virtually and on televisions and various platforms from all over the world because you understand the magnitude of the problem, the urgency



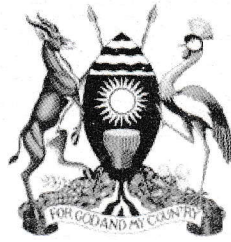
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of immediate action and your commitment not to just stand by. Of course, I know that many of you have already been in the trenches fighting every day to end the cruel, inhuman and vile practice of human trafficking.

Human Trafficking and its scope:

Human trafficking has been defined by many scholars as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of individuals through force, fraud, or coercion for exploitation. Exploitation can take many forms—forced labour, sexual exploitation, recruitment as a child, trafficking for the harvest of human organs, and drug trafficking among others. From the above, it is apparent that human trafficking is a multi-faceted crime, affecting men, women, and children, exploiting the vulnerable, the marginalized, and the desperate regardless of their age, gender, colour or creed.

There are no clear statistics on the actual number of victims but it is generally estimated that up to 40 million people across the globe are living in some form of modern-day slavery! These individuals are subjected to inhumane conditions, stripped of their freedom, and deprived of their rights. Their lives are often reduced to objects of profit for traffickers, who exploit their labor, bodies, and even their identities for financial gain.



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While no country is immune to human trafficking, modern day slavery has not only sustained but perpetuates historical prejudices that have facilitated exploitation and dominance of sections of society undercutting the great strides made in the struggle for equality and other fundamental human rights and freedoms.

The Complexity of Human Trafficking:

Trafficking in humans is a complex crime—as I have indicated already, it is neither simple nor isolated. It is linked to and facilitates other forms of criminality and exploitation that should be a concern to every government in the world and everyone involved in efforts to create an equal, safer and crime free world. Human trafficking enjoys symbiotic relationship with organized crime syndicates; it is aided and perpetuated by corruption; it takes advantage of weak legal systems; it operates in a shadow of limited awareness and understanding among the general population and has the potential to destabilize democracy—especially in weaker states but can upset economic systems even in strong and more advanced societies.

The trade in human beings is fueled by several factors, including economic disparity, political instability, and gender inequality. In regions where poverty and unemployment are rampant, human traffickers find a ready supply of vulnerable individuals who can be coerced or tricked into exploitation. Additionally, the demand for



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cheap labor, sexual services, and illegal access to human organs continues to drive the global market for human trafficking.

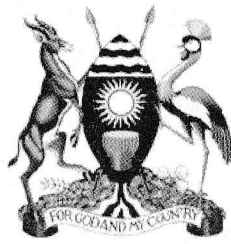
Modern forms of communication aided by Artificial Intelligence, especially the internet and digital platforms have, sadly, exacerbated this problem. While technology can be used to combat trafficking, it also serves as a tool for traffickers to recruit, groom, and exploit victims. Online platforms, social media, and digital communication provide traffickers with new avenues to target individuals, often in ways that are difficult to detect or trace.

Not a lost cause:

I am glad to note that it is not all doom and gloom. Over the years, tremendous progress has been made in raising awareness and strengthening national and international legal frameworks against human trafficking.

In my country Uganda for example, the Parliament passed the **Prevention of Trafficking Persons Act CAP 131**. Thanks to efforts of PACTPAN and other activists including many of you present here today and various other actors both local and international. Several other efforts have been undertaken vigorously across the globe and I am happy to report that they are creating a bulwark against the vice.

Other notable players mainly, the United Nations, the European Union, and regional bodies like ASEAN and the African Union,

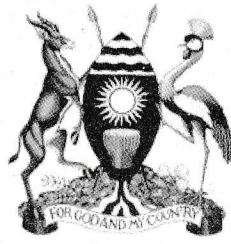


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Catholic Episcopal Conferences as well as, PACTPAN, have taken significant steps in addressing human trafficking through conventions, protocols, and action plans like today's global awareness event.

The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, also known as the **Palermo Protocol**, stands out as a cornerstone of international law in the fight against trafficking. It urges states to enact comprehensive anti-trafficking laws, strengthen cooperation in law enforcement, and establish measures to protect victims. Many countries have adopted these frameworks into their national laws, yet the implementation and enforcement of these laws remain inconsistent.

I notice that a lot more needs to be done. To use my country Uganda as an example again, the **2024 Trafficking in Persons Report** of the United States Department of State as shared by the United States Embassy in Kampala notes that **Uganda remains ranked in Tier 2 on its efforts to combat trafficking in humans** noting that its efforts remain inadequate. The report however commends the Government of Uganda for its training programs for officers involved in the prevention of trafficking in persons. However, there is still inadequate funding for activities around the vice. Partnerships with NGO's and other non-state actors like PACTPAN could also be enhanced.



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A call to action: what must be done:

While progress has been made, much more remains to be done. A comprehensive, multi-faceted effort is required urgently. As stakeholders from diverse sectors, we all have a unique role to play in creating a world free from trafficking.

From legal frameworks to enforcement, from creating awareness to demanding higher levels of accountability and to being truly our brothers and sisters keepers; improved coordination, collaboration and international cooperation—we have never needed one another more.

I would like to call upon all of you Theologians, Philosophers, Lawyers, Professors, Academicians, the faith based organizations, media, government enforcement agencies, regional and international players as well as the private sector to all work together to combat this cancer on our common conscience or we will watch the cancer spread and eat us all up!

Conclusion:

Dear leaders of PACTPAN, friends, ladies and gentlemen, the fight against human trafficking is a fight for the most fundamental of human rights and that is the right to freedom, dignity, and justice. It is a fight that requires collective action, resilience, and unwavering commitment from all of us. As we look to the future, let us pledge to



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work together—across continents, borders, across sectors, and across communities—to end this crime for the last time.

I thank you all for listening to me and for your kind attention.

May God bless all your efforts in the fight against human trafficking.

***Delivered at the Office of the Vice President - Uganda by
H.E. Maj. (Rtd) Jessica Alupo Rose Epel
The Vice President of the Republic of Uganda***