



The Impact of Armed Conflicts on Forced Displacements & Contemporary Forms of Slavery

A study of some contemporary forms of slavery
in conflict countries in the Arab region

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Introduction

Trafficking in persons is a serious crime and a gross violation of human rights, which negatively impacts thousands of men, women, and children who fall prey to traffickers whether inside or outside their countries. Every state in the world is affected by the phenomenon of trafficking in persons, whether that state is the state of origin, transit, or destination of victims. The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the protocols thereto help countries in their efforts aiming at the implementation of the protocol of prevention of human trafficking and punishment of traffickers.

Para. (a) of Article 3 of the protocol to the convention defines trafficking in persons in its various forms, which includes recruitment, transportation, transfer or harboring of persons out of exploitation or detention of persons by threat, use of force, or any form of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, extortion, misuse of power, exploitation of vulnerability situations, or giving sums of money or benefits out of control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. Minimum exploitation includes exploitation of persons in prostitution networks and all forms of sexual exploitation, free and forced labor or servant labor, slavery or practices similar to slavery, or servitude of persons for the purpose of physical use and removal of organs.

The United Nations General Assembly declared 30 July of each year to be the World Day against Trafficking in Persons in its resolution no. 68/192. In 2015, the international community, through the Sustainable Development Goals, pledged to address the global challenges to achieve a better and more sustainable future for everyone. The goal no. 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals aims to eliminate modern-day slavery, trafficking, forced labor, and the worst forms of child labor by 2030 and to end child labor by 2025.

In light of the spread of conflicts and wars at the international level, which led to the displacement of millions of people who escaped death, new forms of slavery have emerged, such as forced marriage, forced labor, and exploitation of children, especially their recruitment in wars, as well as the prevalence of sexual exploitation of women and girls.

Slavery is not just an old historical phenomenon. More than 40 million persons worldwide are victims of modern slavery. Although modern slavery is not defined in law, it is used as an all-inclusive term that includes practices such as forced labor, debt bondage, forced marriage, human trafficking, and other cases of exploitation that cannot

be refused or left by a person because of the threats, violence, coercion, deception or misuse of power. In addition, more than 150 million children are subjected to child labor, which represents about 1 out of 10 children worldwide.

Given the prevalence of the armed conflicts in the Arab region and the ensuing displacement of millions of people and victims who fell into the clutches of human trafficking gangs and all forms of exploitation, **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights** was interested in presenting this study to highlight the link between emigration and forced displacement resulting from armed conflicts and contemporary forms of slavery, especially sexual exploitation of women and girls, child recruitment, forced marriage, and human trafficking, on the occasion of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons.

The legal framework to eliminate contemporary forms of slavery & forced displacement

The Slavery Convention, signed at Geneva on September 25, 1926, and amended under the protocol of the United Nations on December 7, 1953, constitutes the international legal framework under which the States Parties have agreed to put an end to the slave trade, to take all the suitable measures to prevent and suppress the shipping, disembarkation, and transfer of slaves in the regional water and on all ships that fly the flag, and to exchange any possible assistance to reach the goal of eliminating slavery and slave trade.

From this perspective, the Slavery Convention defined in the first paragraph of its first article the concept of slavery as the condition or position of any person over whom the powers resulting from the right of ownership are exercised in whole or in part. The second paragraph of the same article defined slave trade as a definition that includes all the acts involved in capturing a person, possessing or giving him up to others with the intention of turning him into a slave, and all acts involved in possessing a slave to sell or exchange him and all acts of giving up by sale or exchange for a slave who was possessed with the intention of selling or exchanging, as well as any slaves trafficking or transfer¹.

Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also stipulates that no one shall be enslaved or subjected to servitude, and all forms of slavery and slave trade are banned. Articles 23 & 24 of the declaration criminalize forced labor and stipulate that everyone has the right to fair and favorable work conditions and equal pay for equal work without discrimination and that everyone has the right to reasonable work hours.

¹ لمعرفة المزيد عن الاتفاقية الخاصة بالرق، يمكن الرجوع إلى نص الاتفاقية على الرابط، <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/arab/b028.html>

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights also bans slavery, slave trade, and servitude in article 8.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families also include provisions that address forced labor and other forms of exploitation. There are other instruments that deal with trafficking in persons like the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others of 1949 and the protocol to prevent, suppress, and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime of 2000. Convention No.105 abolishes all forms of forced labor. Convention No. 182 stipulates that child labor amounts to forced labor when it is imposed by a third party or the family².

The US State Department also defined modern slavery as a synonym for the concept of human trafficking as comprehensive terms used to refer to both sex trafficking and forced labor. US law and related international law describe the forced service by using many different terms, including forced slavery and the practices similar to slavery, debt bondage, or forced labor, which can include human trafficking but do not require forced movement or transfer. Persons can be considered as victims of trafficking, regardless of whether they were born in slavery, exploited in their hometown, transferred to an exploitative situation, previously agreed to work for a trafficker, or participated in a crime as a direct result of forced exploitation and servitude of their victims.³

The international community also enacted many conventions that criminalized some forms of contemporary slavery, as Convention No. 182 of 1999 on combating the worst forms of child labor, which included the first and second paragraphs of article 3, criminalized the following:-

- All the forms of slavery and similar forms, like trafficking or sale of children and forced or compulsory labor, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children in the armed conflicts.
- The use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances.⁴

² تقرير المقررة الخاصة المعنية بأشكال الرق المعاصرة بما في ذلك اسبابه وعواقبه، مقدم إلى الجمعية العامة للأمم المتحدة 10 يوليو 2009، الرابط، <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain/opendocpdf.pdf?reldoc=y&docid=4acb45e92>

³ Human Trafficking, U.S Department of State, link, <https://www.state.gov/policy-issues/human-trafficking/>

⁴ الاتفاقية 182 بشأن أسوء أشكال عمل الاطفال 1999، الرابط، <https://www.unhcr.org/ar/543a59376.html>

Through this legal framework, it can be said that the contemporary forms of slavery are represented in the following:

- **Forced labor:** The International Labor Organization classifies compulsory or forced labor as any “works or services forcibly imposed on any person under threat of punishment and have not been voluntarily offered by the person himself. Common forms of forced labor are found in the industries that lack regulation or use labor intensively like agriculture, fisheries, construction, manufacturing, domestic work, and the sex industry.
- **Debt bondage:** It is the most common form of contemporary slavery, according to Anti-Slavery International, which confirms that a person becomes a forced laborer when he is called for work as a means of paying a loan he obtained, or when he has to work for very little money or without pay.
- **Human trafficking:** The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime defined human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by threat or the use of force or other means of coercion for the purpose of exploitation.
- **Forced marriage:** This kind of marriage occurs when an individual does not marry with free and full consent. The Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery of 1956 classifies any practice, in which a woman is promised or given up without the right to refuse marriage for payment of a sum of money or payment in kind to her parents, guardian, family, or any other person or group, as an illegal practice. The convention also bans the husband from giving up his wife for a sum of money and also bans the appropriation of a woman’s inheritance after the death of her husband. Although the definition applies only to women and girls (who bear the brunt of forced marriage), there are calls for this definition to include men and boys as well.
- **Child slavery:** Child slavery and their exploitation, including the use of children in armed conflicts, is another common form of contemporary slavery. According to the definition of the International Labor Organization, the worst forms of child labor include the sale and trafficking of children, forced labor, slavery, and compulsory use of children in armed conflicts (recruitment of children).
- **Slavery:** A condition in which a person or a group of persons is considered to be the property of the slave owner and enables him to trade them, but it is the least common form of slavery at present. In such conditions, the slave owner controls

the victims and their offspring, and thus these individuals often become enslaved since birth⁵.

Regarding **forced displacement**, the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) defined forced displacement as the forced and illegal eviction of a group of individuals and population from the land on which they live, which is a practice related to purification and coercive arbitrary procedures carried out by governments or groups intolerant towards a certain ethnic or religious group, and sometimes against several groups in order to evacuate certain lands for an alternative elite or a certain category. The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two protocols attached thereto of 1977 define war crimes as grave violations of the rules established if it was about forced displacement, article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 banned forced mass or individual transfer of persons, or deporting them from their areas of residence to other lands, unless this is in their interest, in order to spare them the risks of armed conflicts. **The article stipulated the following:-**

- Ban of mass or individual forced transfer of the protected persons or deporting them from the occupied territories to the territories of the occupying power or to the territories of any other occupied or non-occupied country, regardless of its motives.
- The occupying power may completely or partially evacuate a certain occupied area if that was required by the security of the population or for imperative military reasons. Evictions shall not result in displacement of protected persons except within the boundaries of the occupied territories unless this is physically impossible, and the population thus transferred must be repatriated once hostilities in this sector cease.
- The occupying power that carries out the transfers or evictions must verify to the maximum extent possible that suitable accommodations are provided to receive the protected persons, and that the transfers occur in satisfactory circumstances from the point of view of safety, health conditions, security, and nutrition, and that the members of the same family are not separated⁶.

The Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia confirmed that forced displacement is a war crime if it is committed in an occupied territory or related to an armed conflict, and it is considered to be a crime against humanity if it occurred against any group of civilian population or occurred against a

⁵ أشكال الرق في العصر الحديث، The New Humanitarian، الرابط، <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/ar/khbr/2013/10/18/shkl-lrq-fy-lsr-lhdyth>

⁶ المادة 49 من اتفاقية جنيف الرابعة، اللجنة الدولية للصليب الأحمر، الرابط، <https://www.icrc.org/ar/resources/documents/treaty/geneva-convention-iv-on-civilians>

large number of people and was practiced systematically. In the case of a crime against humanity, it is not required that the crime occurs in an occupied territory, but maybe committed by a person against the inhabitants of his homeland. As the court reaffirmed what Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention stated, every single case of forced displacement in the occupied territory is considered to be a war crime, but when the numbers of victims increase or systematic policies are adopted to commit crimes, the crime falls within the crimes against humanity. The court also added that the absence of a real option is what makes displacement a violation of the law. The court also added that displacement is forced, even if other methods are used, like fear of violence, compulsion, arrest, and psychological persecution, or abuse of power, or the exploitation of an environment that forces people to displace⁷.

As for the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Statute in Article 6 concerned with genocide, in paragraph E, affirms that transferring children of a certain group to another group forcibly is one of the acts committed intentionally to destroy a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group as such, total or partial destruction, so it is classified as a crime of genocide. Also, **Article (7-1-d)** of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court criminalizes deportations or forced transfers, as the article stipulates that deportation or forced transfer of populations, whenever committed in the framework of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any group of the civilian population, constitutes a crime against humanity, in other words, the deportation of the population or the forced transfer of the population means the forced transfer of the persons concerned from the area in which they are lawfully located, by expulsion or any other forced act without justification permitted by the international law. As for **Article 8, which is concerned with war crimes**, it affirmed that unlawful deportation or transfer constitutes a war crime and that the direct or indirect transfer by the occupying power of parts of its civilian population into the territory it occupies or the deportation or transfer of all or parts of the population of the occupied territory inside or outside this territory, such as war crimes, according to the international custom⁸.

Forced displacements and genocides also correspond to what is stipulated in Article 2 of **the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG)** endorsed by the UN on December, 9, 1948 and came into effect on January, 12, 1951, which listed the following acts that are committed with

⁷ التهجير القسري في فلسطين والعدالة الجنائية، مركز بديل، الرابط، <https://www.badil.org/ar/publications-ar/periodicals-ar/haqelawda-ar/item/2105-article-8.html>

⁸ التهجير القسري في فلسطين والعدالة الجنائية، مركز بديل، الرابط، <https://www.badil.org/ar/publications-ar/periodicals-ar/haqelawda-ar/item/2105-article-8.html>

intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as forms of genocide:

- Killing members of the group.
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group.
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.
- Imposing measures intended to impose forced sterilization within the group.
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Accordingly, forced displacement is interpreted as being a result of internal armed conflicts or disputes of a religious, ethnic, doctrinal or clan nature and it is practiced at the will of a party to the conflict when it possess the necessary power to displace the other parties belonging to other components, believing that its immediate or future interests lie in the displacement of the other party. Moreover, forced displacements occur when a party is threatening a population of different religious, doctrinal or ethnic affiliation not to stay in a certain city, area or country.⁹

Moreover, **the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) adopted in October 2009** imposes the current frameworks of the international humanitarian law (IHL) and the international human rights law (IHRL) as well as some soft laws, such as the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. The Kampala Convention also imposes obligations on State parties to respect and ensure respect for both the IHL and the IHRL, which means that all State parties must ensure that non-state armed groups do not interfere with the enjoyment of human rights by the displaced persons and do not hinder the

⁹ تعريف ومفهوم التهجير القسري في القانون الدولي، استشارات قانونية، 17 يناير 2018، الرابط، <https://bit.ly/35brXNj>

protection of civilians, including those displaced. In non-international conflicts, the conduct of the state and the non-state group shall be regulated by common Article 3 of the 1949 four Geneva Conventions, the 1977 Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions and the most prominent provisions of the IHL, which are an integral part of the customary international law.

Under such Convention and in its Article 7 stipulating the protection and provision of assistance to internally displaced persons in situations of armed conflicts, particularly those with a non-international nature in which armed groups control civilians including the displaced persons, para. 5 of this Article imposes a number of negative obligations on armed groups so as to prevent such groups from participating in these crimes, namely:

- Carrying out arbitrary displacement.
- Obstructing the provision of protection and assistance to internally displaced persons under any circumstances.
- Denying internally displaced persons the right to live in satisfactory conditions of dignity, security, sanitation, food, water, health and shelter; and separating members of the same family.
- Restricting the freedom of movement of internally displaced persons within and outside their areas of residence.
- Recruiting children or requiring or permitting them to take part in hostilities under any circumstances.
- Forcibly recruiting persons, kidnapping, abduction or hostage taking, engaging in sexual slavery and trafficking in persons especially women and children.
- Impeding humanitarian assistance and passage of all relief consignments, equipment and personnel to internally displaced persons.

- Attacking or otherwise harming humanitarian personnel and resources or other materials deployed for the assistance or benefit of internally displaced persons and shall not destroy, confiscate or divert such materials.
- Violating the civilian and humanitarian character of the places where internally displaced persons are sheltered and infiltrating such places.¹⁰

The reality of forced displacement and contemporary slavery in the world

Over the last decades, wars and conflicts worldwide have compounded the numbers of the displaced persons from their countries of origin. In a report issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on June 18 2021, the High Commissioner confirmed that the number of displaced persons has reached a record number of 82.4 million despite the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of refugees, internally displaced persons and asylum seekers has increased by 4% in 2020 compared to a record number of 79.5 million at the end of 2019. For the ninth consecutive year, there has been an increase in forced displacement rates in the world in 2020.

Furthermore, in its report, the Commissioner confirmed that 1% of the people suffer from forced displacement and that the number of uprooted people is twice as high as it was 10 years ago, when the total number was up to 40 million people. By the end of 2020, there were 30.3 million refugees and forcibly displaced persons, including 5.7 million Palestinian refugees and 3.9 million Venezuelans, and 4.1 million people applied for asylum. In addition, the number of internally displaced persons has increased by more than 2.3 million people last year, in particular due to the crises in Ethiopia, Sudan, Sahel states, Mozambique, Yemen, Afghanistan and Colombia. Although the world and life came to a standstill during 2020 because of the Corona pandemic, wars, conflicts, violence, discrimination, persecution and all the factors driving people to flee did not

¹⁰ اتفاقية كمبالا والتزامات الجماعات المسلحة، نشرة الهجرة القسرية، الرابط، <https://www.fmreview.org/ar/non-state/ridderbos>

stop. Amidst such pandemic, more than 160 states closed their borders and 99 of these states did not adopt any exception for people seeking protection.

The statistics of this report reveal that during 2020, more than two thirds of the people who fled abroad were from five states only which are Syria (6.7 million), Venezuela (4 million), Afghanistan (2.6 million), South Sudan (2.2 million) and Burma (1.1 million). Moreover, young men, girls and boys under the age of 18 accounted for 42% of the displaced persons. The estimations of the Commissioner indicate that about one million children were born as refugees between 2018 and 2020. This tragedy of such number of children born in exile is a good enough reason to exert more efforts in order to prevent and put an end to any rising conflicts and violence.

During 2020, about only 3.2 million internally displaced persons and 251,000 refugees returned to their homes; a decline of 40% and 21%, respectively, compared to 2019. Moreover, the rates of refugees' resettlement have also significantly declined, as 34,400 refugees had been resettled last year, which is the lowest level in 20 years due to the small number of places designated for such resettlement and the Covid-19 pandemic, as reported by the Commissioner. For the seventh consecutive year, Turkey has received the largest number of refugees in the world (3.7 million), followed by Colombia (1.7 million), Pakistan (1.4 million), Uganda (1.4 million) and Germany (1.2 million).¹¹

With regard to contemporary forms slavery, and according to the International Labor Organization (ILO), more than 40 million people in the world are victims of modern slavery. Modern slavery refers to some practices that include forced labor, debt bondage, forced marriage, trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation, child labor and forced recruitment of children to use them in armed conflicts. Modern slavery also

¹¹ عدد النازحين بسبب الحروب والأزمات في العالم تضعف في السنوات العشر الأخيرة، فرانس 24 ، 18 يونيو 2021، الرابط، <https://bit.ly/3wFIZGq>

includes cases of exploitation in which the person cannot refuse or leave due to threats, violence, coercion, deception and abuse of power. Moreover, more than 150 million children are subjected to child labor, which is approximately one in ten children in the entire world.

The number of people experiencing modern slavery is estimated at about 40.3 million people, including 24.9 million in forced labor and 15.4 million in forced marriage. There are also 5.4 victims of modern slavery for every 1000 people in the world. One out of every 4 victims of modern slavery is a child. Out of all the 24.9 million people trapped in forced labor, 16 million people are being exploited in private sector such as domestic work, construction or agriculture and 4.8 million people are subjected to forced sexual exploitation, in addition to 4 million people being exploited in forced labor imposed by the state authorities. Moreover, women and girls are disproportionately affected by forced labor, as they account for 99% of the victims of the commercial sex industry and 58% of victims of other sectors.¹²

Factors that led to a connection between forced displacement and contemporary slavery

Wars or armed conflicts are two of the most significant factors that led to a connection between forced displacement and contemporary slavery. The instability resulting from wars or conflicts may subject the besieged communities to forced labor. The rise of ISIS (Daesh) and violence in Iraq and Syria have subjected residents of many communities to the risk of capture or slavery. In 2014, when ISIS invaded some towns inhabited by the Yazidi ethnic minority in north Iraq, they captured thousands of Yazidis and displaced an estimated 360,000 people while hundreds of thousands of them fled, in addition to the abduction and murder of thousands by the armed men. During their

¹² أكثر من 40 مليون شخص لا يزالون ضحايا الرق الحديث، انديندنت عربية ، 2 ديسمبر 2021، الرابط، <https://bit.ly/3wFhSDP>

occupation of these areas, which ended in 2017, the armed men started to practice slavery that involved sexual exploitation of women and girls (they did the same thing to Christians and other minorities). With the expulsion of such armed men, several horrifying facts about the enslavement of Yazidi women and girls have emerged, as they were forced to practice sexual slavery and were sold in the market or given as brides to the combatants by the commanders. These women and girls were sold for prices ranging from \$200 to \$1,500. Moreover, those captured were forced to domestic servitude, cooking, cleaning and sometimes child-rearing. The Kurdistan government has confirmed that the terrorists of ISIS enslaved 6,417 Yazidis and according to the UN, there were an estimated 3,000 Yazidis who remained in captivity until December 2017.¹³

Forced displacement and contemporary slavery in the conflict-affected Arab countries

The Arab world hosts around one quarter of all the forcibly displaced persons in the world. For example, the total number of internally displaced persons in Yemen has reached 4 million people and the levels of internal displacement also remained high in Iraq, Libya and Syria. According to the UNHCR report, at least one person is subjected to forced displacement every two seconds. Conflicts in the Arab region between 2010 and 2019 resulted in the displacement of 2.9 million new people on average each year. Currently, the internally displaced persons account for about 3% of the region population equivalent to the combined populations of Oman, Beirut, Damascus, Dubai and Tunisia. Moreover, the volume of internal and cross-border displacements is unprecedented in some countries, especially because those displaced persons who resort to camps or live in inadequate housing as a result of the conflict and violence were forcibly displaced for a second or a third time, owing to environmental factors such as floods and storms. The sudden slow-onset disasters have also caused the internal displacement of 1.5 million

¹³ Modern Slavery: An exploration of its root causes and the human toll, Council on Foreign Relations, link, <https://www.cfr.org/modern-slavery#!/section1/item-1>

new people throughout the region over the last decade, in addition to the impacts of the economic and environmental factors on the plight of those displaced, where the Coronavirus pandemic has complicated matters even more.¹⁴

This grim reality in the Arab region has resulted in several violations of the established human rights and caused the falling of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons into a cycle of modern slavery, as contemporary forms of slavery are proliferated in the Arab region that are practiced by several parties to the conflict in the region, whether trafficking in persons or forced labor not to mention child recruitment in most of the Arab conflict countries, particularly Yemen, Somalia and Syria. Among the key forms of contemporary slavery resulting from forced displacement and migration in the Arab world are the following:

1. Forced marriage and sexual exploitation:

Forced marriage is recognized as a form of modern slavery. Forced marriage occurs when a person get married without free and full consent. The 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery classifies any practice in which “a woman, without the right to refuse, is promised or given in marriage on payment of a consideration in money or in kind to her parents, guardian, family or any other person or group” is considered an illegal act¹⁵. Moreover, the increasing rates of forced displacement caused by the prolonged armed conflicts lead to a range of violations against women and children in particular. One of the worst forms of such violations experienced by women is forced marriage, as the conditions of forced displacement and migration force the displaced families to marry off their daughters in order to alleviate the economic burden

¹⁴ أكاذيم الموسوي، للاجئين والنازحون في الوطن العربي، الوطن العمانية، 12 يوليو 2021، الرابط، <http://alwatan.com/details/431246>

¹⁵ أكثر من 40 مليون شخص لا يزالون ضحايا الرق الحديث، انديندنت عربية، 2 ديسمبر 2021، الرابط، <https://bit.ly/3wFhSDP>

imposed by such conditions. Forced marriage is also considered a form of modern slavery recognized by the international conventions in this regard.

For example, the continuation of war in **Iraq** has legalized forced marriage. Several human rights organizations have reported that in 2019, some militias like **Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq** provided protection for marriage bureaus managed by some clerics in areas outside the important shrines in Iraq, which announced some temporary marriages of girls aged 9 years or under for the purpose of sex trafficking. According to some local human rights reports, in early 2021, some individuals sought to have sexual relations with children during fishing trips in the Iraqi southern border provinces. In addition, it was reported that early this year, the traffickers continued to open massage parlors in five-star hotels in Iraq as a cover for commercial sex and that some of these hotels are owned by governmental entities, which allows such traffickers to commit their violations with the guarantee of impunity. Moreover, in early 2020, the Iraqi government admitted that these massage parlors, coffeehouses, bars and night clubs are of the most significant places for sex trafficking and that the traffickers use social media to operate their networks and recruit the victims, e.g., advertising for fake job offers.¹⁶

In July 2020, a non-governmental organization reported that some members of LGBT community in Syria were subjected to different forms of sexual violence by government officials, including cases that amount to sexual slavery in military detention centers, prisons and checkpoints.¹⁷

Despite ISIS regional defeat in **Syria** in 2019, ISIS continued to force Syrian girls and women, in the areas under their control, to marry its fighters. ISIS has continued to subject women and girls from minority groups to forced marriage, domestic and

¹⁶ 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Iraq, U.S Department of State, June 2021, link, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/iraq/>

¹⁷ 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Syria, U.S Department of State, June 2021, link, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/syria/>

systemic servitude, rape, sexual slavery, and other forms of sexual violence. ISIS system of organized sexual slavery and forced marriage is an essential component of the terrorist group's ideology and systematic means of oppression. ISIS has subjected girls as young as nine, including Yazidi girls, kidnapped from Iraq to Syria for sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence. Although ISIS has lost its territory inside Syria by the end of 2020, according to human rights reports, approximately 2,800 Yazidi women and girls are still missing. Reports indicate that some of these women and girls are still held with ISIS in eastern Syria or detained in the al-Hol camp¹⁸.

In Yemen, human rights reports revealed an increase in Houthi recruitment of girls between the ages of 13 and 17. They are used as recruits, guards, spies, and more formal roles as teachers and paramedics. Some girls have reportedly been recruited into a designated female-only force, and some have survived the sexual violence and forced early marriages associated with their recruitment¹⁹.

2. Human Trafficking

Human trafficking or direct slavery is the situation in which a person or group of persons are considered the property of the slave owner and enables him to trade them; it is the least common form of slavery at present. In such cases, the slave owner controls the victims and their offspring, and thus these individuals often become enslaved from birth²⁰. A significant consequence of conflicts and wars in the Arab region was the high rates of displacement, which led to many of them falling into the hands of human trafficking gangs. Syria ranked first in the Arab world in 2018 in the global indicator of human trafficking, with a rate of 7.3 out of every thousand people. It was followed by

¹⁸ - 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Syria, U.S Department of State, June 2021, link, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/syria/>

¹⁹ - تقرير للخارجية الأمريكية: الحوثيون يجندون الفتيات والحكومة متواطئة بالاتجار بالبشر، مركز سووث 24 للأخبار والدراسات، 8 يوليو 2021، الرابط، <https://south24.net/news/news.php?nid=1869>

²⁰ - أكثر من 40 مليون شخص لا يزالون ضحايا الرق الحديث، انديبندينت عربية، 2 ديسمبر 2021، الرابط، <https://bit.ly/3wFhSDP>

Iraq with a rate of 4.8. Globally, Syria ranked fourth out of 167 countries after the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Afghanistan, respectively²¹.

In July 2020, the Indonesian government repatriated 104 Indonesian migrant workers from Syria, some of whom were victims of trafficking. In January 2021, the media reported that traffickers fraudulently recruited dozens of Filipino domestic workers to work in the UAE; instead transferred them to Damascus for forced domestic work. Media reports stated that the Philippine government repatriated 34 victims in February 2021.

22

In Iraq, since January 2014, more than five million Iraqis have been displaced. About 1.2 million people are still displaced until the end of 2020, about 80% of them displaced for more than three years, which puts them at risk of continued exploitation. Many of the displaced are housewives who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse due to their alleged association with ISIS. In addition, more than 245,000 displaced Syrian refugees remained in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. ISIS militants kidnapped and captured thousands of women and children, especially the Yazidis, and ISIS fighters subjected them to forced and sexual marriage, slavery, and rape, according to an approved and systematic system for the sale and purchase of women and girls for sexual slavery, including sales contracts documented by the courts administered by ISIS. It was reported that ISIS sold some prisoners to wealthy people in the Gulf countries, and that some Yazidi prisoners were transferred to Syria and Turkey²³.

Between 2015-201human rights reports indicated that trafficking networks in **the Kurdistan region of Iraq** targeted refugees and displaced persons. It operates with the assistance of local officials, including judges, Asayish officials, and border agents. Women

²¹ - في القرن الـ 21.. تجارة الرقيق تستعيد الملايين حول العالم، بوابة الوفد، 23 أغسطس 2020، الرابط، <https://bit.ly/3B3JaXD>

²² - 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Syria, U.S Department of State, June 2021, link, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/syria/>

²³ - 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Iraq, U.S Department of State, June 2021, link, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/iraq/>

and girls in IDP camps whose family members alleged links to ISIS continue to be exposed to a complex system of potential sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, and abuse by armed elements residing in the camps. Reports in 2015 also indicated that a smuggling network exploited internally displaced persons and some Syrian refugee women for sex trafficking in hotels and brothels in Baghdad, Basra, and other cities in southern Iraq after network agents promised to resettle them from the Kurdistan region of Iraq²⁴.

In **Somalia**, human trafficking takes another form. Reports documented that as of February 2021, there were more than 900,000 refugees and 2.6 million internally displaced people from Somalia. Most of these IDPs voluntarily relinquish custody of their children to people with whom they share family and clan ties, who may later exploit some of these children for forced labor or sex trafficking. Many children work indoors or in family businesses. Some traffickers force children to work in agriculture, domestic work, or dangerous work such as drug trafficking²⁵.

In Yemen, over the past five years, human traffickers have exploited local and foreign victims. Yemen was a transit point and destination for women and children, primarily from the Horn of Africa, who were exploited in sex trafficking and forced labor. In March 2015, Saudi Arabia deported Yemeni migrant workers and returned them to Yemen through the al-Tuwal and al-Buq border crossings.

With the continuation of the conflict in Yemen and the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, migrants are exposed to sex trafficking, forced labor, physical and sexual assault, and kidnapping for ransom. In addition, international reports revealed that traffickers were increasingly forcing migrant women to pay debts through working in farms or transporting them to cities to work as domestic workers, exposing them to debt

²⁴ - 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Iraq, U.S Department of State, June 2021, link, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/iraq/>

²⁵ - 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Somalia, U.S Department of State, June 2021, link, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/somalia/>

bondage. In addition, conflicts compounded with the spread of the pandemic have led to an increased rate of reverse migration of migrants originating in the Horn of Africa and Yemenis fleeing the country to Djibouti. Since May 2020, 7,652 migrants have traveled from Yemen to Djibouti on smuggling boats or foot²⁶.

3. Violations against children

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by world leaders, including Arab leaders in 2015 include a renewed global commitment to end child labor. These goals call on the international community to take effective measures to eradicate forced labor and end contemporary slavery and human trafficking to ensure the prohibition and eradication of the worst forms of child labor, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and to end child labor in all its forms by 2025.

But conflicts and wars in the Arab region over the past decade coincided with an increase in child labor among refugee and internally displaced children and other populations across the region. Reports confirmed that refugee and displaced children work in various sectors, with a noticeable increase in child labor on streets, forced labor, early marriage, and commercial sexual exploitation, in addition to the high rate of recruitment of children, whether from the local population or refugees, and their exploitation by armed groups, especially in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Somalia. Although child soldiers are generally boys, there is an emerging trend to recruit more girls and children under 15. Hundreds of children are detained throughout the Arab region and subjected to torture because of their involvement with armed groups²⁷. The most prominent violations against children are as follows:

²⁶ - 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Yemen, U.S Department of State, June 2021, link, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/yemen/>

²⁷ - تقرير جديد يبين ارتفاع نسبة عمل الاطفال في منطقة الشرق الاوسط وشمال افريقيا نتيجة النزاع والتزوج الجماعي، منظمة العمل الدولية، 19 مارس 2019، الرابط، https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_677757/lang--ar/index.htm

- **Forced and Child Labor:** A study in 2019 revealed that 12,708 Syrian refugees live in 1,902 tents in informal settlements in Lebanon in four regions of the Bekaa and Baalbek-Hermel governorates, 65% of whom are under the age of 18. The discrepancy in monthly income with expenditure was the motive for the Syrian refugee children engagement in work in Lebanon. The study also indicated that 75% of Syrian refugee children work in agriculture, a profession considered dangerous and unsuitable for their age. It was reported that 30% of them are injured at work, and more than 40% of them are insulted in their workplace.²⁸ In 2016, child protection organizations also reported increase in child marriages. It could increase the risk of child trafficking among displaced Syrians and refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq²⁹.
- **Child Recruitment:** Child recruitment in armed conflicts is the most prominent feature in the Arab region. In Yemen, international reports indicated that the Houthi group used male children in combat roles or guard checkpoints, and forced others to perform other duties such as cooking, laundry, and gathering information. Houthi used girls between 13 and 17 as recruits and guards, as well as in non-combat work. During April and September 2020, the Houthi group illegally recruited and used at least 65 children between 12 and 17, compared to 23 in 2019³⁰. In the past three years (2018, 2019, 2020), the Houthi group has launched an open and compulsory campaign to recruit children. It opened 52 training camps for thousands of teenagers and children, and spread forced recruitment campaigns in Sa'ada, Sana'a, Al Mahwit, Al Hudaydah, Tihama, Hajjah, and Dhamar, targeting children from 10 years old. According to international and

²⁸ - غالبية اطفال اللاجئين السوريين في لبنان يعملون، العربي الجديد، 26 يونيو 2019، الرابط، <https://bit.ly/3xC0UXX>

²⁹ - 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Iraq U.S Department of State, June 2021, link, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/iraq/>

³⁰ - تقرير للخارجية الامريكية : الحوثى يجند الفتيات والحكومة متواطئة بالاتجار بالبشر، مركز سوٲ 24 للاخبار والدراسات، 8 يوليو 2021، الرابط <https://south24.net/news/news.php?nid=1869>

local reports, the Houthi group has forcibly recruited about 10300 children in Yemen since 2014. They deliberately enrolling the children in ideological programs revolving around the ideology and doctrine of the Houthi group, then they are sent to a training camp to attend a military course for a month, after that, they go to the fighting fronts. They were assigned to carry out the tasks of direct engagement, laying mines, and guarding military points³¹.

In Syria, as of January 2021, international reports indicated that there were 27,000 children, including 8,000 children of foreign terrorist fighters, in displacement camps in northeastern Syria, including the al-Hol camp run by the Syrian Democratic Forces. Some of these children were potential victims of human trafficking and used in hostilities or support roles by armed groups including ISIS³². In Somalia, all conflict parties participated in child recruitment, which illegally recruited and used male and female child soldiers (between 10 and 17 years old). Between April, June, and September 2020, 213 children (including 12 girls) were recruited and used by all actors, and 426 children (including 15 girls) were recruited between October and December 2020. The recruitment and use of at least 710 children have been documented since the beginning of 2021. International reports have confirmed that governmental and non-governmental agencies involved in child recruitment have used 67% of children for unknown purposes in the conflict. 22% of children are combatants in hostilities, and 11% of children are in supportive roles such as security guards, checkpoint guards, couriers, and cleaners. In 2021, observers reported three cases in which security

³¹ - تقرير للأورومتوسطي وسام، جماعة الحوثيين تجند أكثر من 10 آلاف طفل في اليمن، 11 فبراير 2021، الرابط، <https://bit.ly/2VqR39s>

³² - 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Syria, U.S Department of State, June 2021, link, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/syria/>

forces recruited and armed child boys and girls to guard public buildings and government officials in Mogadishu³³.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In conclusion, the different parties to the conflict in the Arab region are complicit and involved in the high rates of slavery, which resulted from displacement due to the continuation of their military operations. Forced displacement and contemporary slavery have a direct relationship in the Arab region. The displacement rates led to thousands of victims falling into the clutches of human traffickers and gangs exploiting children and women. Therefore, Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights stresses the need to reach an immediate solution to the armed conflicts in the Arab region to reduce the rates of displacement that cause all the violations to which the victims are exposed. It also reaffirms the need to respect and promote human rights for all, especially children and women. It requires immediate international action to stop violations against civilians, protect women and children in Yemen, Somalia, Syria, and Iraq, and try to end decades of horrific violations against these groups. Maat, in light of the above, recommends the following:

- The urgent and immediate need to protect children in the Arab region, whether their exploitation is a result of purely economic issues or is associated with conflict and displacement.
- Compatibility of national legislation with international legal standards and ensuring effective implementation of child labor laws and regulations.

³³ - 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Somalia, U.S Department of State, June 2021, link, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/somalia/>

- Protecting children from recruitment and use in armed conflict and rehabilitating and reintegrating children in armed conflict.
- States also have a responsibility to review existing legislation and assess whether it is creating the conditions in which exploitation of all kinds can flourish.
- Any legislation, policy, and practice that exacerbate violations must be repealed. There are still gaps in protecting the vulnerable and in working to prevent impunity.
- There must be international cooperation to activate the international legal rules criminalizing slavery in all its forms and controlling borders to tighten the screws on human trafficking gangs.