

**Statement from the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC)
on
World Day Against Trafficking in Persons 2026**

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This July 30th, on the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, I want to talk about something that gets treated as a criminal justice problem when it is really a symptom of something much larger. Trafficking does not appear out of nowhere. It grows in the gaps we leave behind, in the places where people lose the ability to choose what happens to their own lives.

I have watched this pattern hold across very different contexts, and it keeps coming back to the same conditions. Poverty strips away the margin a person needs to say no to a bad offer. War and displacement strip away the community and legal protection that would normally catch someone before they fall. When a person has no land, no income, and no state willing to stand behind them, they become exactly the kind of target traffickers look for. This is not a coincidence. It is the business model.

What troubles me is how much of this is getting worse rather than better. Displacement numbers keep climbing. Conflict zones keep multiplying rather than resolving. Economic opportunity in many regions has not kept pace with population growth or the basic cost of living. Every

one of these trends widens the pool of people with no good options left, and that pool is where trafficking recruits from.

I do not think we solve this by focusing only on enforcement after the fact, though that work matters too. I think we have to take seriously the idea that the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**, when they talk about ending poverty, building peace, and creating decent work, are also describing an **anti-trafficking strategy**. A person with a stable income, a functioning legal system behind them, and a community that has not been scattered by conflict is a person who is much harder to traffic. Reducing the conditions that produce vulnerability is not a side benefit of development work. It is one of the most direct ways to reduce trafficking in the first place.

So, on this day, I would rather ask a harder question than the usual awareness slogans allow. What would it take for the countries most affected by displacement and poverty to actually see progress on the SDGs, and what is our responsibility, individually and collectively, in making sure that progress happens? Trafficking will not shrink on its own. The conditions that create it will have to shrink first.