

**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation**

Ref.: AL RUS 7/2025  
(Please use this reference in your reply)

15 May 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants and Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 51/15, 52/20 and 57/20.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning allegations of long-standing trafficking in persons and forced labour of migrant workers in the Golyanovo district of Moscow. Specifically, Uzbek nationals Ms. Bakiya Kasimova and Ms. Gulzhanar Nazanova, along with numerous other victims, were lured under false pretenses to work in grocery stores owned by a criminal network. They were reportedly subjected to inhumane working and living conditions, sexual and other forms of violence, and forced abortions. Also, the abduction of children was reported. Despite repeated complaints from victims and reports by civil society, we have been informed that no effective investigation has been carried out to date. Perpetrators continue to operate with impunity, and victims have received no redress.

According to the information received:

The situation in the Golyanovo district of Moscow involves long-standing and systemic trafficking in persons and forced labour, primarily targeting migrant women from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Since the early 1990s, a substantial number of individuals – including Ms. Bakiya Kasimova and Ms. Gulzhanar Nazanova – were lured with false promises of legitimate employment in grocery stores but were instead subjected to severe sexual and labour exploitation and other forms of violence.

The shops where the victims were exploited are located at Uralskaya Street 13, Novosibirskaya Street 11, and Parkovaya Street 15 of Moscow. They were reportedly owned and operated by members of an extended family network. Over the years, various family members – including siblings, parents, children, and spouses – were involved in the management and daily operation of these establishments. Some individuals associated with the network are reported to have changed their legal names over time, and some have moved abroad, including to the United States.

Upon arrival at the shops, victims' passports, phones, and personal belongings were confiscated by the perpetrators – the shop owners and their staff. They were then confined within the stores and forced to work up to 20 hours a day

without pay. Working and living conditions were inhumane – victims were denied adequate food, medical care, and basic hygiene products. They were forced to sleep on the warehouse floors and subjected to continuous surveillance, with their movements strictly controlled. The perpetrators imposed psychological control through threats of violence, deception about future rewards, and exploitation of the victims' vulnerability compounded by their irregular migration status, leaving them in a state of total dependency.

The victims endured regular physical violence which may amount to ill-treatment or torture, including beatings with fists and blunt objects. Some were stripped naked and subjected to humiliating punishments, such as being doused with cold water or forced to place their feet in boiling water. They were also forced to participate in the beatings of other victims. Women who attempted to resist or escape were met with even harsher abuse, including threats against their families.

Sexual violence was a systematic element of the exploitation. The victims were routinely raped by other shop workers or other individuals chosen by the traffickers. In some cases, women were forced to engage in sexual acts as punishment. As a result of these rapes, some victims became pregnant, only to be coerced into having abortions under the supervision of the traffickers. Others gave birth while in captivity, only to have their children forcibly taken from them by the shop owners. One of the victims, Ms. Bakiya Kasimova, lost her daughter Kamilla under unexplained circumstances while she was held hostage by the perpetrators allegedly in Kazakhstan. Her son taken by the perpetrators, suffered severe malnutrition and lifelong developmental issues due to prolonged neglect.

On 30 October 2012, a group of human rights activists and journalists intervened at the shops, successfully rescuing several victims.

Despite numerous complaints from victims to Russian investigative bodies since 2010 until 2022 and reports by journalists and civil society organizations dating back to the late 1990s, Russian authorities consistently failed to intervene. Instead of properly identifying, investigating or prosecuting the perpetrators, law enforcement ignored complaints, refused to register cases or conducted only superficial pre-investigative inquiries. In some instances, law enforcement officers actively assisted the traffickers by returning escaped victims to them.

Over the years, at least 32 decisions were issued by the Investigative Committee of Russia refusing to open a criminal case, despite the credible and well-documented allegations. Even when a criminal case was finally open on 4 November 2012, it was abruptly closed just two days later on the grounds that the victims had allegedly “consented” to their treatment and remained in the stores at their own free will – despite overwhelming evidence of coercion and abuse. Investigative authorities failed to take essential procedural steps, such as gathering forensic evidence, including carrying out medical examinations of all victims and their children that also were in captivity, reviewing security camera footage from the shops, questioning customers and neighbors or obtaining

information from hospitals where victims' children were born. Instead, it is reported that investigators solely relied on testimonies from the perpetrators and victims still under their control for swiftly closing the case.

Russian authorities never sought legal assistance from the victims' countries of origin or recruitment – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. However, on 28 July 2010 Kazakhstani authorities sent a legal assistance request following a complaint received from one of the victims. Russian police officers only conducted a preliminary inquiry with no further action and consequently, the investigation in Kazakhstan was suspended. In 2012, the Kazakhstani Embassy in Moscow, following complaints from victims' families, formally alerted the Golyanovo police department to the situation and requested a criminal investigation. Despite this, no action was taken. Meanwhile, Uzbekistani authorities pursued an investigation against one of the traffickers who had been initially detained in Russia under an Uzbekistani international warrant and extradited to Uzbekistan leading to her conviction for human trafficking by the Bostanlyk District Criminal Court in Uzbekistan on 10 March 2017. Criminal complaints submitted to Russian investigative authorities referenced this conviction, yet no action followed. Additionally, in June 2010, the International Organization for Migration informed the Russian Government about the trafficking of victims, identified specific perpetrators, as well as the location of the store on Uralskaya Street. Russian police officers only conducted a preliminary inquiry and refused to institute criminal proceedings.

According to the information received, this situation has been made possible by a series of structural failures within Russia's legal and administrative framework. First, the Russian authorities failed to establish a comprehensive legislative and administrative framework to effectively prevent trafficking in persons, hold perpetrators accountable, and effectively protect victims. Russian criminal law does not clearly define human trafficking in accordance with international standards, failing to recognize that consent obtained under coercion is invalid and that trafficking can occur through means other than physical force, such as threats, abuse of power, or debt bondage. These deficiencies violate Russia's obligations under articles 3(a) and (b) and 5(1) of the Palermo Protocol, which it ratified on 26 May 2004.

Second, Russia lacks adequate regulatory measures to prevent trafficking in persons. The country has never adopted a comprehensive anti-trafficking law or a national action plan to combat contemporary forms of slavery. It was brought to our attention that there is no coordination between relevant authorities, no systematic research or data collection on human trafficking, and law enforcement officials receive no specialized training. Civil society organizations that might have played a role in assisting victims have been systematically suppressed – branded as “foreign agents”, sanctioned, or even dissolved by the State.

Third, the Russian government has failed to put in place any meaningful protections for victims of trafficking in persons. No mechanisms exist to identify or assist survivors. Victims receive no material, legal, or medical assistance, and shelter services remain unregulated and grossly inadequate.

Furthermore, article 322.1 of the Russian Criminal Code criminalizes assistance to undocumented migrants, effectively deterring organizations and individuals from providing aid to victims of trafficking. Accordingly, the victims in the case at hand received no form of assistance or redress from the government. On the contrary, Russian authorities even attempted to deport Ms. Kasimova on the ground of violation of migration rules which is in violation of international human rights norms and standards, including the non-punishment principle enshrined in the Palermo Protocol.

As a result of these systemic failures, Russia has experienced a severe deterioration in its human trafficking situation in recent years. It is estimated that nearly two million people live in conditions of contemporary forms of slavery in Russia<sup>1</sup>, with a significant proportion being migrant workers from Central Asia, particularly women and girls – like the victims in the case in question.

The case at hand has been considered by the European Court of Human Rights in its recent judgment *F.M. and Others v. Russia* (Nos. 71671/16 and 40190/18). The Court found a violation of article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights, confirming that Russian authorities had failed to prevent trafficking, protect victims, or hold perpetrators accountable. This ruling underscored the same systemic flaws outlined in the information received and described above.

Without prejudging the accuracy of the above-mentioned allegations, we are deeply concerned about the systemic human rights violations described above, the reported long-standing nature of these practices and the alleged involvement of organized criminal networks. We consider that they require urgent and decisive action from the Russian authorities.

The repeated failure to conduct a full-scale investigation into credible allegations of human trafficking and to recognize victims as such also remains deeply concerning. In this regard, we urge your Excellency's Government to open a comprehensive criminal investigation, establish all relevant facts, and ensure that these well-substantiated allegations are thoroughly examined. In particular, we call on your Excellency's Government to address the investigative deficiencies, if proven, by taking the following steps: reviewing security camera footage from the implicated stores; collecting all necessary forensic evidence, including medical examinations of all victims and their children; collecting information from hospitals where victims' children were born. Furthermore, it is essential to seek legal assistance from Uzbekistani and Kazakhstani authorities to obtain relevant information regarding respective criminal proceedings in these states, the conviction of one of the traffickers in Uzbekistan and to clarify the circumstances surrounding the alleged death of Kamilla, the daughter of Ms. Bakiya Kasimova who reportedly was an infant at the time and is alleged to have died under unknown circumstances.

In line with the non-punishment principle enshrined in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, ratified by the Russian Federation on 26 May 2004, we also urge your Excellency's Government to ensure that victims of trafficking are not subjected to punishment,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cdn.walkfree.org/content/uploads/2023/09/29083443/GSI-Snapshot-Russia.pdf>.

deportation, or any other measures that could further put them at risk. Instead, they should be promptly identified, provided with access to justice, and guaranteed comprehensive protection, including medical, legal, and psychosocial assistance, as well as safe housing and long-term reintegration support.

In her reports to the Human Rights Council in 2023 and 2024 the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation has stressed that there is no longer any safe space for civic action in Russia, with laws on “foreign agents” having devastating effects, obliterating not only the freedoms of expression, association and assembly in the Russian Federation, but also the civic rights to participate in public life (A/HRC/57/59, paras. 137, 139). In this regard, the Special Rapporteur recommended: “(j) Repeal urgently restrictive legislation on “foreign agents” (...) and cease the practice of designating as “foreign agents” those exercising their freedoms of opinion and expression, especially independent media organizations, political associations, LGBT advocates, feminist, environmental and Indigenous activists and other civil society activists and organizations” (para. 150).

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide details, and the results of any investigations, prosecution or criminal charges against the alleged perpetrators, Government officials, or other actors in relation to the allegations. In particular, please clarify why the victims in this case were not recognized as victims of trafficking and other forms of exploitation.
3. Please outline the criminal legislation in place to prevent trafficking in persons, including of migrant workers. Please, specify the relevant provisions of the Russian Criminal Code, including whether they prescribe the invalidity of victims’ consent given under coercion and whether they recognize that trafficking in persons can be committed through means other than physical force, in compliance with international standards.
4. Please provide information on any other legislation, policies, regulations, or national action plans adopted or under consideration to combat trafficking in persons and contemporary forms of slavery. In particular, describe steps taken to strengthen cooperation among state bodies responsible for combating trafficking in persons and contemporary forms of slavery.

5. Please indicate the measures taken to address discrimination based on sex, ethnicity, or migration status in the context of trafficking in persons and forced labour.
6. Please provide information on the mechanisms in place to identify, refer, and assist victims and survivors of trafficking, including children, to prevent re-trafficking, abuse, and further exploitation in a timely way.
7. Please describe the measures taken to ensure that alleged survivors of trafficking and other forms of exploitation, including forced labour receive adequate protection, including immediate access to medical care, psychosocial support, shelter services, legal assistance, and access to justice and effective remedies, including compensation. In particular, specify measures taken for women and children who have experienced sexual violence in the context of their exploitation.
8. Please describe the measures taken to ensure that civil society organizations can operate freely and effectively in assisting victims of trafficking and other forms of exploitation. In particular, address the impact of branding these organizations as “foreign agents,” imposing sanctions, or dissolving them, and explain how the State ensures these organizations can provide necessary support to victims without facing suppression.
9. Please provide official statistics related to human trafficking and other forms of exploitation such as forced labour, including the number of criminal complaints registered, the number of cases investigated, and the number of perpetrators held accountable. Additionally, include disaggregated data on the profile of the victims, including their sex, nationality, and migration status.
10. Please provide details on the cooperation between your Excellency’s Government and the Governments of migrant-sending countries, particularly Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, to combat transnational trafficking networks, ensure fair and ethical recruitment practices, and strengthen consular protection and assistance for migrant workers in the Russian Federation.
11. Please outline any training programs for law enforcement, judicial officials, and labour authorities on the identification and protection of migrants and victims of labour and/or sexual exploitation.
12. Please specify the actions taken to uphold the principles of non-refoulement and non-punishment for victims of trafficking, particularly in relation to migration-related offenses.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency’s Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please be informed that a copy of this letter has been sent to the Governments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Tomoya Obokata  
Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences

Gehad Madi  
Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants

Mariana Katzarova  
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation

## **Annex**

### **Reference to international human rights law**

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to refer to the attention of your Excellency's Government the international human rights standards that are applicable in this case. The situation described can be defined as trafficking in persons and forced labour, as per the definitions set forth in article 3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol), supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, acceded by your Excellency's Government on 26 May 2004. In particular, the definition prescribes that trafficking in persons can be committed by various means, such as "the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation".

As regards to the protection of victims of trafficking in persons, we would like to draw your attention to the Palermo Protocol articles 5, 6, 9, 10 which set out the obligations on State Parties to criminalize, protect and prevent trafficking in persons, in cooperation with relevant State Parties, and to assist victims of trafficking.

The human rights violations reported also constitute indicators of forced labour as established by the ILO, including the following: abuse of vulnerability; deception; restriction of movement; isolation; physical and sexual violence; intimidation and threats; retention of identity documents; withholding of wages; debt bondage; abusive working and living conditions; and excessive overtime. We wish to recall that your Excellency's Government ratified the C029 - Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) on 23 June 1956.

According to the OHCHR Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, States have an international obligation to identify victims of trafficking. It is highlighted that a failure to identify a trafficked person correctly is likely to result in a further denial of that person's rights. We also would like to refer to principle 13 of these recommended Principles and Guidelines, which provides that "States shall effectively investigate, prosecute and adjudicate trafficking, including its component acts and related conduct, whether committed by governmental or by non-State actors."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948, further contributes to international standards regarding the elimination of all forms of slavery. Article 4 states that "no one shall be subjected to slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms." Article 7 provides that all are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.

We would also like to draw your Excellency's attention to article 8 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, binding for your Excellency's Government as of the ratification of 16 October 1973, which prohibits slavery, the slave trade, servitude, and forced labour, as well as to article 26, which stipulates that the law

shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground.

We would also like to refer to article 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), binding for your Excellency's Government as of the ratification of 16 October 1973, which recognizes the “right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work.” These conditions must guarantee, among other things, remuneration that provides all workers, at a minimum, a decent living for themselves and their families; safe and hygienic working conditions; rest, leisure, and reasonable limitation of working hours; periodic vacations; as well as remuneration for public holidays.

We wish to refer to articles 1, 2, and 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), binding for your Excellency's Government as of the ratification of 4 February 1969, and CERD General Recommendation on discrimination against non-citizens.

We would also like to recall the Principles and Guidelines on the human rights protection of migrants in vulnerable situations. Particularly, we would like to draw your attention to principle 3 on access to justice, which calls upon States to “take measures that will enable migrants, including migrants at particular risk of marginalization and exclusion, to enjoy effective and equal access to justice” and to “ensure that migration status that depends on a single employer or a partner is not a barrier to seeking or obtaining protection, support, or justice.” This principle further guides States to “strengthen or establish official mechanisms and procedures to receive, investigate, and monitor allegations of human rights violations and abuse of migrants,” as well as to “consider granting legal status to migrant victims or witnesses of crimes during the process of accessing justice.”

Further, principle 7 on the protection from violence and exploitation establishes that States must take measures to prevent and respond to all forms of exploitation and violence against migrants and guides States to “ensure that the measures taken will prevent the recurrence of abuse and are accessible to all migrants”; to “ensure that legislation and policy, as well as practice, reduce the risk that migrants will be exploited by those who offer them services or work in the formal or informal sectors, including the risk of being subject to forced labour or trafficking in persons”; and to “establish accessible and confidential services for migrants who are survivors of violence and exploitation,” further stating that migrants’ experiences of violence “should be addressed without causing further victimization.”

We would also like to refer to objective 6 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, where States commit to facilitating fair and ethical recruitment and safeguarding conditions that ensure decent work (para. 22, A/RES/73/195). Furthermore, under objective 14, States are committed to enhancing consular protection, assistance, and cooperation throughout the migration cycle (para. 30, A/RES/73/195).

The full texts of the human rights instruments and standards recalled above are available on [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org) or can be provided upon request.