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MEASURES TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE AVIATION SECTOR

(Presented by Saudi Arabia)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper presents the experience of Saudi Arabia in implementing measures to counter human trafficking, in line with the relevant provisions of Annex 9 — *Facilitation* to the Convention on International Civil Aviation. According to the Standards outlined in this Annex, Contracting States are expected to adopt effective measures to ensure the existence of comprehensive national policies and procedures to combat trafficking in persons, including the establishment of clear reporting channels and the designation of official points of contact within the competent authorities to facilitate communication with airport operators and airlines.

Given that combating human trafficking and supporting its victims requires close cooperation and coordination among national entities, it has been essential to establish a national mechanism serving as a reference document that outlines the framework for handling victims of trafficking. This includes defining the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders to ensure the provision of integrated and comprehensive support services that protect victims from exploitation and assist in their reintegration into society.

To this end, Saudi Arabia launched its first National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for victims of human trafficking in 2020, which was further developed in early 2024. The mechanism outlines how relevant agencies should coordinate rapid response efforts to support victims—from identification and rescue, to providing assistance and protection services, to the investigation and prosecution of traffickers, and finally to voluntary return and reintegration of victims into society. The mechanism also provides a regulatory framework for collaboration with civil society institutions and international partner organizations, in accordance with national regulations, Saudi Arabia's international obligations, and in alignment with international best practices in this field.

<i>Strategic Goals:</i>	This information paper relates to Strategic Goal <i>Aviation Delivers Seamless, Accessible and Reliable Mobility for All</i> .
<i>Financial implications:</i>	There are no additional financial implications.

¹ English and Arabic versions provided by Saudi Arabia.

<i>References:</i>	Anti-Human Trafficking Crimes Law (Saudi Arabia) National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Human Trafficking – Second Edition (2024) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime Annex 9 – <i>Facilitation</i> , 17th Edition Doc 10171, <i>Manual on a Comprehensive Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking in the Aviation Sector</i>
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Human trafficking is one of the largest forms of organized crime globally. International reports estimate that approximately 27.6 million people are living in conditions of modern slavery. Data collected from cases supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) over the past decade show that nearly 80 per cent of international human trafficking routes pass through official border control points, including airports.

1.2 Although the primary responsibility for identifying, apprehending, and prosecuting traffickers lies with governments and national law enforcement agencies, the aviation sector acknowledges that frontline personnel engaging with passengers can play a vital role in preventing this crime. The sector can contribute meaningfully by committing to several strategic areas that can be translated into practical anti-trafficking measures, namely:

- a) sharing best practices;
- b) training aviation personnel at airports and on aircraft; and
- c) implementing identification, referral and reporting mechanisms.

1.3 Once trained, aviation personnel—including airline, airport, ground handling, security screening and customs staff—can become a crucial source of intelligence in the fight against human trafficking. These professionals are well-positioned to recognize behaviours that may indicate the presence of trafficking victims and to report their observations to the appropriate authorities at airports and during flight operations.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Anti-Human Trafficking Crimes Law – A national legislative framework outlining criminal offenses and penalties related to trafficking in persons.

2.2 National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Human Trafficking – Second Edition (2024) – A procedural guide that defines roles, responsibilities and processes for identifying and assisting victims.

2.3 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (also known as the Palermo Protocol).

2.4 Annex 9 – *Facilitation* to the Convention on International Civil Aviation – The relevant International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) provisions requiring States to implement effective measures against trafficking in persons at airports, including the establishment of reporting channels and coordination mechanisms.

2.5 By Chapter 8 of Annex 9, which includes specific Standards for States to counter human trafficking, the following provisions are highlighted:

Standard 8.45	8.45 Contracting States shall take measures to ensure that procedures in place to combat trafficking in persons are based on a Comprehensive Strategy and include clear reporting systems and relevant competent authorities' points of contact for airport and aircraft operators. <i>Note.— Key elements to incorporate into a Comprehensive Strategy to combat trafficking in persons include: laws; leadership; policies; reporting protocols and response mechanisms; partnerships; training; public awareness; data collection; information-sharing; and victim and survivor support. These key elements should be based, to the extent possible, on a victim-centred and trauma-informed approach. Further guidance on developing a Comprehensive Strategy, including examples, can be found in Doc 10171.</i>
Standard 8.46	8.46 Contracting States shall take measures to ensure that airport and aircraft operators' personnel in direct contact with the travelling public are provided with awareness training on trafficking in persons.

2.6 Based on the above and in line with Saudi Arabia's efforts to combat human trafficking, the Anti-Human Trafficking Crimes Law was issued in 2009. This law defines trafficking in persons and outlines the acts and means through which traffickers exploit victims. It identifies various forms of trafficking, including: sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, begging, practices similar to slavery and organ removal.

2.7 Saudi Arabia has also acceded to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and ratified its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children. Furthermore, the Anti-Human Trafficking Committee approved the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for victims of human trafficking in 2020. In 2024, the Committee released the second edition of the mechanism, aiming to provide clear guidance for relevant entities on how to address trafficking cases, support victims, and ensure their protection, by internationally recognized best practices.

2.8 The mechanism has been in effect since its adoption, and national expertise has been developed in rescuing victims, delivering services, and protecting them from the risk of re-trafficking, in addition to criminal investigation and prosecution of offenders under the applicable legal framework. The 2024 version of the mechanism was updated to ensure broader alignment with national legislation relevant

to trafficking cases and to remain entirely consistent with the Kingdom's international obligations. It also aims to reduce procedural and operational gaps to achieve optimal outcomes and enrich Saudi Arabia's national experience in this field

2.9 The mechanism is subject to regular review and continuous improvement by the Anti-Human Trafficking Committee, ensuring it remains up to date with progress made in this domain. It consists of six key stages, outlined as follows:

2.9.1 Stage 1: Identification of the Victim

This stage aims to determine whether a person may be a potential victim of human trafficking by observing visible initial indicators identified by the first responder. At this point, a report of a potential trafficking victim is generated. First responders use standardized indicator checklists to conduct a preliminary assessment and identify potential victims.

2.9.2 Stage 2: Rescue and Shelter of Victims

This stage involves ensuring the safe transfer of the potential victim from the location of exploitation to a secure facility (designated shelter) in order to provide appropriate protection and assistance. Services are provided according to the case's specific needs, taking into account the victim's physical, psychological and medical condition.

2.9.3 Stage 3: Investigation and Prosecution (Formal Legal Designation)

This stage ensures that the competent authority has completed preliminary investigative procedures and initiated formal investigations. The victim is officially recognized as a presumed victim by the Public Prosecution. Investigative and legal procedures are carried out by the Criminal Procedure Law, leading to judicial proceedings until a final verdict is issued.

2.9.4 Stage 4: Protection and Assistance

This stage focuses on providing necessary support to both presumed and confirmed victims during the investigation and prosecution phases. Efforts are made to ensure that the victim is not re-trafficked, while options for voluntary return, remaining in Saudi Arabia or relocation to a third country are assessed.

2.9.5 Stage 5: Voluntary Return

This stage aims to assist the victim in voluntarily returning to their country of origin, relocating to a third country or remaining in Saudi Arabia temporarily or permanently by national regulations.

2.9.6 Stage 6: Reintegration

This final stage ensures continued follow-up on the victim's reintegration into society, with comprehensive support including social and economic assistance, psychosocial empowerment and safeguarding against re-victimization. All procedures in this phase are coordinated with the relevant authorities and, when applicable, through diplomatic channels to provide the necessary support for victims.

3. COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE AVIATION SECTOR

3.1 As ICAO Member States continue advancing their initiatives to combat human trafficking, a more victim- and survivor-centered approach can be adopted. This includes establishing government-operated hotlines that provide services for victims and survivors, with a focus on rapid response, trauma-informed practices and coordination with law enforcement to respond effectively to suspected cases of human trafficking.

3.2 Such an approach ensures that first responders understand how trauma may affect a victim's interaction with law enforcement or service providers. The priority of this approach is to safeguard the safety and security of victims, enhance inter-agency coordination at the national, regional and international levels, and ensure effective interventions that avoid re-traumatization.

3.3 Through survivor-informed and trauma-aware training, with a focus on identifying and supporting potential victims, law enforcement agencies can deliver immediate and appropriate emergency assistance. Hotlines, in turn, can provide non-emergency referrals and direct victim services.

3.4 Moreover, ensuring that anti-human trafficking programmes are survivor-informed, victim-centered and trauma-sensitive improves the overall quality and effectiveness of efforts to prevent and respond to trafficking in persons.

3.5 Accordingly, comprehensive and effective strategies by civil aviation authorities, organizations, aircraft operators and airports should address the following categories and actions:

3.5.1 **Legislation:** Ensure the development of comprehensive strategies that align with international and domestic laws related to trafficking in persons across all areas of operation.

3.5.2 **Leadership:** Issue a public leadership statement outlining proactive steps the organization is taking to combat human trafficking. National action plans and strategies should highlight the critical role of the transportation sector—particularly aviation—in addressing human trafficking.

3.5.3 **Policies:**

- a) **First:** Adopt a zero-tolerance policy on human trafficking, with a focus on survivor needs. Zero-tolerance provisions should be integrated into contractual agreements with vendors, agencies and other relevant entities.
- b) **Second:** Develop human trafficking guidelines for employees who are informed about survivor needs, taking into account each company's resources, business practices and risk exposure.
 - i. Victims are being threatened with deportation or legal action.
 - ii. Appearing under the influence of substances or showing signs of confusion.
 - iii. Avoiding or distrusting authority figures, including law enforcement officials.