Joint statement from The Ministry for Foreign Affairs in France and from The Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Sweden

Today - on the International Women's Day - the Government of France and the Government of Sweden are proud to announce our joint decision to develop a common strategy for combating human trafficking for sexual exploitation in Europe and globally.

Trafficking is a grave human rights violation of which the majority of detected victims are women and girls. The majority of them are being trafficked for sexual exploitation. The overall number of victims has drastically increased in tandem with the unprecedented rise in irregular migration and forced displacements, notably as result of armed conflict, persecution or human rights violations. War, lack of economic opportunity, discrimination and gender-based violence further expose vulnerable individuals to abuse, particularly in situations where erosion of the rule of law allows traffickers to operate with impunity.

France and Sweden are both committed to fostering comprehensive inter-agency strategies and action plans in their own countries to tackle the challenge of human trafficking as well as to develop international cooperation in this area. The two Governments confirm their intention to support the "Blue Heart" international campaign awareness raising initiative to fight human trafficking and its impact on society and encourage all other States to join.

The main focus of our common strategy will be the need to reduce the demand for girls and women in prostitution, in Europe and globally. The reason for this is the clear nexus between trafficking for sexual exploitation and prostitution. A nexus that is well described in numerous studies and also highlighted by the European Parliament in resolution (2013/2103(INI)) on sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality. Trafficking for sexual exploitation will continue as long as there is a demand for girls and women in prostitution. Therefore, focusing on reducing demand will be an important measure for combating trafficking for sexual exploitation, for combating violence against women and children and for enhanced gender equality.

France and Sweden have taken a clear position against normalizing prostitution as work. Our view is that prostitution should always be perceived as an exploitation of someone's vulnerability – thus prostitution should never be considered a job. To consider prostitution as legal 'sex work', decriminalizing the sex industry in general and making procuring legal is not a solution to keeping women and children in vulnerable situations safe from violence and exploitation, but has the opposite effect and expose them to higher level of violence, while at the same time encouraging prostitution markets — and thus the number of women and children suffering abuse — to grow.

France and Sweden together with several other countries have introduced legislation where the purchase of sexual services constitutes the criminal act, not the services of a person in prostitution. The person in prostitution is instead offered assistance to exit prostitution. This

type of legislation, that focus on the sex buyer, has proven effective both to diminish demand and to diminish prostitution. The results in Sweden, where the legislation has been in place for twenty years, are very positive; demand has decreased substantially, there are few people in prostitution and Sweden is considered a market of low interest for trafficking for sexual exploitation. In 2016 a regulation similar to the Swedish legislation was enacted in France, introducing the criminalization of the purchase of sex, the full decriminalization of persons in prostitution, and the creation of a nation-wide public exit, protection and assistance policy for victims of prostitution, pimping, procuring and trafficking. The French government firmly believes that this legislation will prove as effective in France as in Sweden.

The French legislation has recently been challenged but on the first of February this year the French Supreme Court validated the constitutionality of the law. At the same time a survey that was undertaken in France by Ipsos showed that 78% of French people support the 2016 Act and that 74% of French people think that purchase of sex is a form of violence.

All countries in the world have agreed to do everything they can to achieve the goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Several goals target human trafficking, gender equality, sexual exploitation and violence against women and children. Both our countries are convinced that criminalizing the purchase of sex would be a very important step towards achieving these goals. We will therefore put this agenda in the forefront of our common advocacy for combating trafficking for sexual exploitation in Europe and globally.

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