

**STATEMENT READ BY MADAM VICTORIA NATSU, AG. EXECUTIVE
SECRETARY OF THE HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE SECRETARIAT AT A PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE
REPATRIATION OF GHANAIA CHILDREN FROM SOUTH AFRICA**

WEDNESDAY, 24TH FEBRUARY, 2016

Ladies and gentlemen of the press

On behalf of the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection Hon. Nana Oye Lithur, I wish to thank you for presence here today. We thank you for your continuous cooperation with us, as we work in the interest of all persons in Ghana.

We have called you here today to brief you on issues surrounding the repatriation of 21 trafficked Ghanaian Children from South Africa.

On the 15th of December, 2015 the Department of Social Development under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MOGCSP) in collaboration with representatives of the International Organization of Migration (IOM), the Anti Human Trafficking Unit of the Police Service, the South Africa Embassy and the Human Trafficking Secretariat also under MOGCSP, received twenty-one (21) Ghanaian minors trafficked to Pretoria, South Africa to play football.

This followed a request to MoGCSP from the Ghana High Commission in Pretoria to the Minister of Gender of Gender, Children and Social

Protection and the National Security Coordinator to assist in handling a suspected trafficking scheme involving the 21 minors. The request, received on 30th July, 2015, also contained detailed particulars of the minors including scanned data pages of their Ghanaian Passports.

The Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection Hon. Nana Oye Lithur upon receiving the request, worked assiduously with officers of MOGCSP, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Anti Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) of the Ghana Police Service and other key partners, with support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Don Bosco to have the children repatriated to Ghana. On the 15th of December, 2015 the children arrived in Ghana.

Ladies and gentlemen of the media, our checks have revealed the following:

- The trafficked children were between the ages of 9 and 16
- All the children came from different villages in Sefwi in the Western
- They were deceived into believing that they were going to be trained in South Africa and sent to Europe, Sweden and America to play football.

- The trafficker was able to convince the parents/ guardians and the chiefs at a durbar where he was given a parcel of land to set up a football academy.
- The parents were deceived and convinced to pay huge sums of monies to the trafficker to send the children to South Africa.
- Some of the parents even sold their land and cocoa farms for their children's travel to South Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen of the media, while in South Africa, the children were made to play a few trial matches. The trafficker then returned to Ghana under the pretext of recruiting more of the children but was never seen again. After the expiry of the visas, the South African Department of Social Development rescued the children and sent them, to a shelter in Pretoria.

Since their arrival, we have kept them in a shelter and taken through various rehabilitation processes. Officers of the Shelter have assisted them to fully recover from the trauma suffered in South Africa. They are now ready to be reunited with their parents.

The Department of Social Development would do follow-up visits to the communities affected to meet with the chiefs, opinion leaders and the parents for sensitization and to empower them to be able to identify potential traffickers. The District Social Development Officers in those

districts will take over the reintegration of the children to ensure they are enrolled back into school and are doing well.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Government of Ghana takes a serious view of human trafficking. That is why it is taking steps to combat the menace. The Human Trafficking Legislative Instrument has been passed and this will aid implementing partners in the effective implementation of the Human Trafficking Act.

The MoGCSP is in the process of developing a Human Trafficking National Plan of Action that will have a standardized system of fighting trafficking by all stakeholders. We are also in the process of implementing the Child Protection Compact Agreement signed between Ghana and the United State of America with very key stakeholders and we will be making our presence felt more in the communities, in buses on radio and local FM stations to sensitize the public to issues of trafficking in persons.

Ladies and gentlemen of the media, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection would like to advise every Ghanaian to be on the lookout for such scams. In this particular instance, the traffickers used the press to advertise the recruitment exercise. We would therefore caution the media to be a bit more cautious in advertising such so called opportunities.

We also urge all parents and guardians to ensure that their children complete their education before seeking greener pastures. The Department of Labour, Ghana Immigration Service and the Anti Human Trafficking Unit of the Police service are all institutions which can guide and assist anybody who has difficulties in their travel plans. There is no short cut in the scheme of things and therefore we must all be guided by what has happened to these children and their parents and learn lessons from it.

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, your continuous support will help the Ministry to fight child trafficking
THANK YOU