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**Consideration of reports submitted by States
parties under article 40 of the Covenant**

Costa Rica*

**Information provided by the Government of Costa Rica on
the implementation of the concluding observations of the
Human Rights Committee (CCPR/C/CRI/CO/5)**

[17 November 2009]

* In accordance with the information transmitted to States parties regarding the processing of their reports, the present document was not formally edited before being sent to the United Nations translation services.

Paragraph 9. The Committee is concerned about overcrowding and poor conditions in the State party's detention centres, including those administered by the migration authorities (article 10 of the Covenant).

The State party should take steps to end overcrowding in detention centres, including those administered by the migration authorities, and to ensure compliance with the requirements of article 10. In particular, the State party should take into consideration the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

1. On 20 January 2009 the manual of operational guidelines and procedures for temporary detention centres for foreigners without legal status started to be applied. This instrument governs the centres' different activities and procedures, along with the rights and duties of the detainees and the officials staffing the centres. Under the guidelines issued by the Costa Rican Migration and Aliens Office, application of the manual is mandatory in respect of detainees, their visitors, the staff who work at the centres, and other public administrative officials and police officers. The manual must also be applied to representatives of embassies, consulates and non-governmental organizations wishing to visit detainees.

2. The document highlights the fundamental human rights and principles applicable to all persons, who — regardless of their migration status — enjoy a number of inherent rights. The manual must be consistently applied within a framework of migration control that upholds migrants' human rights and fully respects and acknowledges the integrity of all persons, without discrimination on the basis of a person's social or cultural status, gender or race, or discrimination of any other kind that devalues him or her as a human being. The Migration and Aliens Office has reported on the contents of the manual and its application to the Permanent Forum for the Migrant and Refugee Population.

3. The third chapter of the manual refers to general conditions in the centres, specifying not only what areas they must contain, but also how the detainees must be housed in the centres. Article 61 states:

Aliens must be housed in general dormitories, allowing for separation between women, men and families, with an effort being made to group them by nationality, save in exceptional cases. In no case shall the number of people housed in such centres exceed the capacity, and the necessary measures shall be taken to avoid overcrowding.

4. The State is continuing its efforts to strengthen and entrench respect for human rights in the execution of criminal penalties. Efforts have been made to redefine the technical approach taken to this group. This led to the adoption in 2007 of new technical regulations that promote skill development and an understanding of the factors contributing to criminal conduct so as to make it easier for prisoners serving their sentences to have a crime-free future.¹

5. As a result, approximately 30 per cent of the prison population are now engaged in some level of formal education, thanks to cooperation agreements between the Ministry of Justice, the State Distance Learning University (UNED) and the Ministry of Public Education. Participation in cultural, recreational and sports events is encouraged as well; last year 1,975 such events were held. Similarly, civil society organizations are encouraged

¹ The country has a prison population of approximately 9,000 people housed in closed prisons, more than 700 housed in open centres under the Semi-Institutional Programme and approximately 4,500 people who belong to the Care in the Community Programme, which monitors people who are on conditional release and oversees the implementation of non-custodial sentences.

to conduct projects in prisons, and detainees are provided with the means to keep in touch with their family members and friends.²

6. The coverage of health services has been improved and extended by strengthening prison health programmes and by means of agreements with the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS). As a result, there is one doctor for every 37 prisoners, while the legislation on national comprehensive care calls for one doctor for every 4,500 inhabitants. At the same time, a policy for the improvement and expansion of prison infrastructure has been maintained in order to provide decent conditions for prisoners.

7. With regard to categories of prisoners belonging to vulnerable groups, steps have been taken to meet the needs of older persons, including the maintenance of specialized facilities. Also, the establishment of gender-sensitive projects for women prisoners has been encouraged. Lastly, mention should be made of the agreement concluded in April 2009 between the Ministry of Justice and the health authorities for the construction of a prison psychiatric hospital, which will provide treatment for mentally disabled persons serving sentences.

Paragraph 12. While acknowledging the State party's efforts to combat trafficking in women and children and sexual exploitation, such as surveillance systems and alliances with private-sector actors, including hoteliers and taxi networks, the Committee is concerned at the lack of public awareness of the unlawful nature of such phenomena. It also regrets that it has not received clear-cut information regarding the alleged trafficking of children from Ecuador in 2004. The Committee is concerned that such acts may go unpunished (arts. 2 and 24).

The State party should reinforce measures to combat trafficking of women and children and, in particular:

(a) Ensure that penalties commensurate with the seriousness of the acts are imposed on anyone engaging in such exploitation;

(b) Continue its efforts to generate public awareness of the unlawful nature of the sexual exploitation of women and children;

(c) Provide training courses for the competent authorities;

(d) Protect victims so that they may find refuge and testify against those charged in criminal or civil cases, and award them compensation.

8. Trafficking in persons in Costa Rica is not a matter for the executive branch of power alone (central government ministries and institutions), since a great deal of responsibility for the prosecution and punishment of trafficking lies with the judiciary (Public Prosecutor's Office, Judicial Investigation Department and judges).

9. Nevertheless, in line with the commitments undertaken by Costa Rica when it became a party to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the Convention, it has proceeded to establish the National Coalition Against Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons (CNCTIMTP). The Coalition is coordinated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police and Public Security and seeks to strengthen strategic alliances between government institutions, international cooperation agencies, foundations and non-governmental organizations

² The policy of transferring persons from the Institutional Programme to the Semi-Institutional Programme has been stepped up, enabling prisoners to carry out their sentence in family and community settings, while receiving care and follow-up.

working together to combat this crime. Its objectives, which are oriented towards the ultimate aim of guaranteeing the full enjoyment of human rights, are to: maximize resources and results in the areas of prevention, information, and the detection of victims and networks; to provide care to victims of trafficking; and to ensure that traffickers are punished.

10. By Executive Decree No. 34199 of 3 January 2008, the State of Costa Rica made changes in the Coalition, assigning a range of functions to its technical secretariat (coordinated by the Vice Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police and Public Security). The Coalition was also given the opportunity to introduce mechanisms for monitoring information compiled at training activities, including: general data on participants; methodology used; agenda of work; and documents showing agreements reached and/or commitments entered into. This information is stored in physical and digital form.

11. Trafficking worldwide — whether by air, land or sea — is on the increase. The geographical position of the Central American region lends itself to the use of all three modes of transport, and Costa Rica is no exception; it is thus a country of origin, destination and transit for trafficking in persons for labour or sexual purposes.

12. For 2008, the Coalition was informed of victims of trafficking sent to Mexico, Nicaragua and Japan. Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Colombia and the nations of East Asia were identified as countries of origin of alleged victims of trafficking arriving in Costa Rica.

13. According to data provided in the 2008 report on the geographic mapping of trafficking, San José is the main destination and “re-distribution” city for internal and transnational trafficking. It is followed by the provinces of Guanacaste and Puntarenas and the border zones of Peñas Blancas and Paso Canoas, which are considered to be extremely vulnerable areas. The trend continues to be from south to north; it is known that trafficking is linked to migration and that — by road — the northern zone of the country is the most vulnerable, since there are also north-south flows.

14. Since 2008 the Coalition, through one of its subcommissions, has studied around 30 instances of apparent trafficking, only two of which involve possible victims who are nationals of Costa Rica. The others involve Guatemalan, Nicaraguan and Colombian nationals. All of these cases have been brought before the relevant judicial authorities.

15. In one of the cases studied, after carrying out a comprehensive inter-institutional assessment, the State of Costa Rica, as a protective measure, decided to grant special refugee status to a person from the Central American region who was the victim of commercial sexual exploitation. The Coalition focuses on guaranteeing the protection and due care of victims and has set up a model for care and protection which is now in the process of being implemented.

16. Most alleged victims of trafficking identified in the cases studied by the Coalition are migrants with irregular status. A majority of them exhibit a range of physical and psychological signs of trafficking, such as malnutrition, symptoms of anxiety and physical lesions.

17. The possible cases of trafficking mainly concern females ranging from 11 to 19 years of age, who are either nationals of Costa Rica (from rural or urban zones) or foreigners (including Nicaraguans, Colombians and Dominicans). Many of these situations involve sexual exploitation, domestic work, the construction sector in the case of men, and agricultural activities, among others.

18. The cases studied by the Coalition in the reporting period indicate that the traffickers belong to international organized criminal groups which offer well-paid jobs; even when legal documents exist — as is usually the case — the traffickers hold on to them.

19. Detailed information on traffickers will be provided by the relevant judicial authorities, the work of the Coalition being mainly focused on prevention, immediate intervention and the provision of care to victims. The investigation phase is dealt with by the Public Prosecutor's Office and the courts.

20. The structure of the Coalition facilitates the coordination and convergence of activities and projects on this topic, and a series of training sessions on prevention of the crime of trafficking have been held for key public officials of the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, various police forces, representatives of non-governmental organizations and population groups that are vulnerable to trafficking. A comprehensive model has been drawn up which consists of a body of rules, procedures and provisions that lay down guidelines for the care and protection of this population group. This model gives concrete expression to the State's obligations in terms of the provision of comprehensive care and protection using an inter-institutional, intersectoral and flexible approach aimed at ensuring protection, recovery and reintegration.

21. For the first time in Costa Rica's history, budget funds have been allocated since 2008 to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Police to carry out anti-trafficking activities. Such is the level of commitment that, in February of the year in question, strategic activities related to trafficking were incorporated into the Jorge Manuel Dengo Obregón National Development Plan 2006–2010; this reflects Costa Rica's commitment, and that of its institutions, to combating this scourge.

22. One of the major strengths of the Coalition is that its coordination and technical secretariat are provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police and Public Security. This frees up the existing capacity of the police forces assigned to this branch so that it can be put to use in carrying out work to prevent and identify possible cases of trafficking, one of the institution's public policies in the area of prevention being to guarantee that formal, validated procedures for police and administrative officers are included in the general training curricula of the National Police School. Bridging courses are offered throughout Costa Rica for police officers who graduated prior to 2008.

23. In addition to formal training, the Coalition has carried out training and awareness-raising activities aimed at public officials (mainly officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police and Public Security, Immigration Police and Judicial Investigation Department), representatives of non-governmental organizations and vulnerable population groups. Attention has also focused on the improvement of police procedures for the identification of victims of trafficking and for direct interventions. Awareness-raising activities have been effective, in that there are clear signs that the different police forces are committed to, and identify with, efforts to combat trafficking as a result of their attention being drawn to such aspects as the focus on human rights, the distinction between the different forms of smuggling and trafficking, and the issue of consensual prostitution. This is reflected in the due diligence shown by public officials in their work in this field. The approach being taken in this area demonstrates the country's commitment to combating this national and international crime, which prevents inhabitants from fully exercising their rights.

24. However, the fact that the establishment of the Coalition's technical secretariat is such a recent development and the lack of an executive structure within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police and Public Security have limited the impact of the work provided for under the Plan to combat this crime. It is for this reason that draft legislation is to be submitted to the Legislative Assembly this year in order to establish the Coalition by means of a national law, which would take the place of the existing executive decree.

25. The definition of the criminal offence of trafficking in persons has undergone various transformations in the history of Costa Rican criminal law. The 1924 Criminal

Code provided for penalties, under article 318, for the offence of “white slave traffic”. Since 1941, other changes have been made. In 1949 the article in question was repealed by article 218 of the Health Code; 1970 saw a further amendment to the criminal offence of trafficking in persons, with the category of minors being introduced into the section on victims, and the wording of the provision being changed. Aggravating circumstances were also established in respect of the offence, thereby defining the offence of aggravated procuring. In 1998, the Act to Prevent the Exploitation of Minors amended article 172 of the Criminal Code, and a further amendment was made in August 1999.

26. When applying the article, the offence of trafficking in persons has sometimes been confused with the offence of people smuggling and aggravated procuring.

The previous Criminal Code read as follows:

“Article 172

Anyone who promotes, facilitates, or aids and abets the entry into or departure from the country of persons of either sex for the purpose of engaging in prostitution or of keeping them in sexual servitude or slave labour shall be punished with from 3 to 6 years’ imprisonment. The penalty shall be between 4 and 10 years’ imprisonment if any of the circumstances enumerated with respect to aggravated procuring apply.” (Amended by Act No. 7899 of 3 August 1999, published in the official gazette (*La Gaceta*), No. 159 of 17 August 1999.)

27. The Coalition, after analysing the definition of the offence of trafficking in persons as set forth in the current Criminal Code, decided to bring the wording into line with the requirements for the effective prosecution of the offence, and therefore drew up a bill that was submitted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Legislative Assembly. In its proposal, the wording is modified and, for the first time, internal trafficking and the aggravating circumstances constituting this offence are introduced, as well as a maximum 16-year prison sentence. The proposed wording removes any possibility of confusion — when the article is applied by prosecutors and judges — with the offences of smuggling of migrants and procuring. Act No. 8720 on the protection of victims, witnesses and other parties involved in criminal proceedings and amendments to the Criminal Code was published in the official gazette (*La Gaceta*), No. 77 of 22 April 2009.

Article 172

“Offence of trafficking in persons.”

Anyone who promotes, facilitates or aids and abets the entry into or departure from the country, or travel within the country, of persons of either sex for the purpose of engaging in one or more acts of prostitution, exploiting them or subjecting them to sexual servitude or slave labour, slavery or practices similar to slavery, forced labour or service, forced marriage, begging, illegal removal of organs, or unlawful adoption shall be punished with from 6 to 10 years’ imprisonment.

The penalty shall be from 8 to 16 years’ imprisonment if the offence involves any of the following circumstances:

- (a) The victim is under 18 years of age, is in a vulnerable situation or is disabled;
- (b) Deceit, violence or any other means of intimidation or coercion is used;
- (c) The perpetrator is the spouse or partner of the victim, or a relative up to the third degree by blood or by marriage;

- (d) The perpetrator takes advantage of a relationship of authority or trust with the victim or the victim's family, whether based on ties of kinship or otherwise;
- (e) The perpetrator takes advantage of the exercise of his or her profession or the function he or she performs;
- (f) The victim suffers serious damage to his or her health;
- (g) The punishable offence is committed by a criminal group consisting of two or more members.

28. In order to combat sexual exploitation, there has been a major overhaul of legislation in Costa Rica, in particular through Act No. 8590 on strengthening efforts to combat the sexual exploitation of minors through amendments and addition of articles to the Criminal Code (Act No. 4573) and amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure (Act No. 7594) concerning the offences of: rape; sexual relations with minors; paid sexual acts with minors; sexual abuse of minors and disabled persons; sexual abuse of adults; corruption; procuring; pimping; and the manufacture, production or reproduction of pornography.

29. In 2008, in the area of prevention, the bodies belonging to the Coalition successfully introduced a training module for the community police and launched a national information campaign on preventing and reporting trafficking in persons. In the area of victim protection, the Coalition, in conjunction with other bodies, gave training on its protocol for the repatriation of child and adolescent victims of trafficking, to officials working at consulates abroad; in addition, training sessions were held for officials responsible for the protocol's implementation. Also, the Coalition has developed a model for the care and protection of victims of trafficking and has set up a rapid response team for cases of trafficking which was scheduled to become operational with the entry into force of Executive Decree No. 35144-MG-MTSS in the second quarter of 2009. In addition, with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), local protection systems are being established in order to improve inter-agency coordination and thus help communities to provide an effective response in the event of violations of the human rights of children and adolescents, such as trafficking in persons.

30. The term "training" is used here to mean any training activities lasting more than 16 hours. As part of this national effort, the Ministry of the Interior, Police and Public Security, the Coalition and UNICEF trained 50 members of the community police and police instructors to identify possible situations of trafficking and to train students and members of the relevant communities in the prevention of trafficking. In addition, the topic has also been included in the curricula of the National Police School with a view to creating an awareness of the issue on the part of police at all levels by 2009.

31. The term "awareness-raising" is used to refer to activities lasting for up to eight hours that are aimed at providing an opportunity for information exchange and discussion. Members of the community police were in charge of these information activities, which involved telling people about trafficking and about what to do in suspicious cases. Pamphlets on trafficking were also distributed.

32. With regard to cooperation with international organizations, there has been intense collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Save the Children and the Spanish International Cooperation Agency for Development (AECID), in addition to non-governmental organizations such as the Paniamor Foundation, the International Centre for the Human Rights of Migrants (CIDEHUM), the Rahab Foundation, Defence for Children International (DNI) and others.

33. As is well known, trafficking in persons is generally a transnational crime. For that reason, purely national strategies are insufficient: efforts to combat trafficking must be made in a joint, organized manner at subregional level. This was demonstrated at the first Meeting of National Coalitions against Trafficking in Persons in the Central American Region, Mexico and the Dominican Republic (San José, 10–12 November 2008), a recent Costa Rican initiative (the Costa Rican Government also helped with all the human resources-related logistics) organized in conjunction with IOM, ILO, UNICEF, Save the Children and AECID. At the event, public officials from the various countries entered into broad discussions on the urgent need to establish formal and informal mechanisms for horizontal cooperation, victim care and protection, the exchange of good practices and specialized research, while also linking and coordinating the various national, bilateral and multilateral efforts. The Government of Costa Rica also reports to various international bodies, such as the Regional Conference on Migration, the Central American Integration System (SICA) and the network of Central American organizations working to combat trafficking.

34. Costa Rica has a range of instruments for the care and protection of victims, including a protocol for the repatriation of child and adolescent victims of trafficking, a protocol for minors drawn up by the National Child Welfare Agency (PANI), a response mechanism which is integrated into the 911 emergency call system and the care and protection model developed by the Coalition. The implementation of this model will strengthen existing mechanisms and tailor the work of the institutions involved in order to provide an appropriate response at national level to take the place of the isolated, ineffective responses seen in the past.

35. These tools have been made available to public officials working for institutions belonging to the Coalition with the aim of providing a comprehensive response to trafficking in persons. In addition to the formal training given to police officers (already described in this report), the technical secretariat has funded training for the officials of various consulates, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and officials of the Migration and Aliens Office.

36. One of the areas of the Coalition's work being the care and protection of victims of trafficking, a special subcommission was set up to develop a model for care and protection. This initiative has been included in the National Development Plan.

37. The model is built around a number of approaches:

(a) Human rights approach. This is based on the fact that the State must uphold human rights, without discrimination of any kind, and that human rights are unwaivable, indivisible and inalienable;

(b) Gender-based approach. This acknowledges and takes into account, with the aim of fine-tuning the care to be provided, all the social influences which have resulted in men and women being, thinking and acting differently and which historically have led to the establishment and perpetuation of a relationship of dominance and control;

(c) Generational approach. This involves tailoring all aspects of institutional policies, practices and provisions to match the stage of development of children and adolescents. It also entails conceiving new types of relationships between adults and minors based on the acknowledgement and respect of children's and adolescents' rights;

(d) Contextual approach. This means that any work done by an institution must take into account the historical conditions of a particular society, as well as the family, community, institutional, economic, political and sociocultural context of the minors in question.

38. The model for care and protection also includes the rules, procedures, guidelines and provisions that govern the delivery of care in fulfilment of the State's obligations. Within the framework of the model, care is perceived as a comprehensive process incorporating multiple inter-institutional and intersectoral responses.

39. The model has clearly consolidated the guiding principles described earlier, in that it facilitates the provision of proper care to victims, regardless of their status, nationality, age or any other factor.

40. At a practical level, thanks to the involvement of the institutions belonging to the Coalition, shelters and other forms of accommodation are provided for victims by the National Institute for Women, the National Council for Rehabilitation and Special Education, and the National Child Welfare Agency. These institutions furnish a range of specialized services adapted to victims' needs (including medical and psychological care, and legal advice). Because of the dangers involved in housing victims of trafficking in these shelters, protocols have been drawn up for police intervention to protect them.

41. In accordance with Act. No. 8764 on migration and aliens, which was published in *La Gaceta* No. 170 of 1 September 2009, the Migration and Aliens Office recognizes migrants as a special category of trafficking victims. The aim is to address the situation of migrants who, because of their migrant status, need to be treated differently (art. 94) and require different services.

42. The judiciary has a victim support bureau which has the mechanisms required to provide protection to both victims and key witnesses. Act No. 8720 on the protection of victims and witnesses contains specific articles for the protection of victims of trafficking and lays down penalties for anyone who gives information that could endanger those victims.

43. Practical activities are also coordinated with the various agencies for international cooperation and with non-governmental organizations. These include the work carried out jointly with the Paniamor Foundation and Save the Children in preparing the 2008 report on the geographic and social mapping of trafficking.

44. Agencies and organizations such as UNHCR, IOM and UNICEF have been involved in conducting studies in this area.

45. The Coalition's technical secretariat, working in conjunction with UNICEF, has submitted a proposal to the United States embassy in Costa Rica for the creation of a special shelter for victims of trafficking.

46. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police and Public Security, via its police forces, carries out a range of ongoing control and prevention operations to combat trafficking in persons. This has been made possible by the training carried out by the Coalition's technical secretariat. Most of the cases studied by the subcommission responsible for developing a model for care and protection, as well as those brought before the Public Prosecutor's Office and investigated by the Judicial Investigation Department, have been detected as a result of the preventive work carried out by the administrative police.

47. In its prevention work, the Costa Rican police force has a community security division whose staff has already been trained and coached in facilitating the prevention of trafficking in persons. This initiative has been accompanied by a national mass media campaign.

48. The division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs that is responsible for regulating advertising also carries out active prevention work, in conjunction with the Ministry of Public Education, in schools and colleges located in vulnerable zones.

49. Another example of institutional capacity-building is the creation of a “platform for prevention”. This initiative, which is managed by the Vice Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police and Public Security, incorporates a series of related themes, including commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents and gender-related violence. The issue of trafficking has also been addressed in the context of this platform. The platform’s work has been strengthened as a result of the technical support provided by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for the creation of a formal structure within the institution.

50. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police and Public Security, the National Child Welfare Agency (PANI), the Coalition, UNICEF and IOM have conducted information campaigns on this subject in the last two years.

51. The campaign entitled “Don’t be fooled”, designed to warn teenagers, families and communities about the risks and consequences of trafficking in persons, was designed with the help of young people and adults. It features television advertisements, radio slots, posters, cartoons and a range of teaching materials for use in training community police officers, adolescents and adults who then organize seminars and other activities for the prevention of trafficking in their communities.

52. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police and Public Security, as the Coalition’s governing body, has been carrying out a range of strategic activities in order to put the issue of trafficking on the national agenda. These include the campaigns “Don’t be fooled” and “No more trafficking in persons”, during which trained police officers worked in the communities, informing people and warning them about this crime.

53. The “No more trafficking in persons” campaign seeks to highlight the outcomes of exploitation and trafficking of persons, which include not only forced sexual relations, but also forced labour. The campaign aims to show what happens to the population groups who fall victim to trafficking.

54. Similarly, with the support of the United States embassy, awareness-raising activities have been organized for radio, television and newspaper journalists who deal with the issue of trafficking and therefore need to know more about this problem.

55. Bi-national workshops with Panama and Nicaragua were held on the subject of the routes, and potential routes, used for trafficking, during which key informants set out data on maps that could be interconnected in such a way that they could be analysed in an overall manner, and the relevant findings and recommendations deduced.

56. This information facilitates the use of a coordinated, effective approach by countries in dealing with, preventing and punishing these crimes, as well as in updating information on national and international road, air and sea routes and unauthorized entry points. In addition to this work, the Coalition’s technical secretariat, with the help of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Paniamor Foundation and Save the Children Sweden (technical and logistical support), took up the challenge in October 2008 of incorporating the report on geographic and social mapping into its work as a tool of analysis based on the research work done in connection with a study on trafficking in persons for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. The aim is to obtain synergetic results based on relevant information or findings that can be generalized in order to perfect the data compilation, research and decision-making processes. This approach is intended to remedy the lack of reliable information that exists in any country that does not have institutional or organizational databases on trafficking.

57. The relevant information obtained to date includes data on the following subjects:

- (a) Internal trafficking routes;

- (b) Areas that are vulnerable to the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents and to trafficking, by province;
- (c) “Cooling-off” areas (places in which traffickers keep their victims for a period of time before moving them to other areas, inside or outside the country);
- (d) “Blind spots” (places unauthorized for legal entry to, or exit from, a country);
- (e) Sex tourism;
- (f) Profiles of exploiters;
- (g) Victims (risk factors; mechanisms for protecting their rights);
- (h) Intermediaries involved in the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents and in trafficking;
- (i) Estimates of the scale of the problem in Costa Rica;
- (j) An analysis of the general trends observed.

58. The mapping of land border zones was carried out in bi-national workshops with border police, migration officials, and investigating and prosecuting officials from the two countries (Panama on 27 and 28 November 2008 and Nicaragua on 28 and 29 January 2009) involved in each zone. National mapping (central Pacific coast) was carried out in October with the help of key Costa Rican informants in the health and education sector.

59. Another source of information is the 911 emergency telephone service, which registers possible cases of trafficking in persons and transmits them to the relevant authorities, including the National Child Welfare Agency (PANI), the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police and Public Security, the National Institute for Women (INAMU) and the Judicial Investigation Department. To this end, each call that is logged is assigned a specific code.

60. Both the Judicial Investigation Department and the Public Prosecutor’s Office have their own sources for obtaining and verifying information for use in ongoing investigations.

61. The issue of handling and compiling information on trafficking is one of the challenges that will be addressed by every relevant government institution’s implementation of the model for care and protection drawn up in 2008. This will allow information to be handled efficiently.

62. Recent studies by international bodies have demonstrated the existence of networks of criminals specializing in the trafficking of persons in the Central American region.³ Numerous cases have been submitted to judicial bodies and protection institutions along with requests for assistance or legal action. Analysis of paradigmatic cases shows the complex level of organization of these networks, as well as the extremely harmful consequences for victims of this crime.

63. In the knowledge that efforts to combat organized crime must themselves be of an organized nature, the countries in the region have created platforms for inter-institutional coordination in the areas of prevention, victim care and crime prosecution. Most countries already have a national action plan, bringing together the different skills and responsibilities of key actors at national level. In the course of drawing up and implementing these action plans, these platforms — also called coalitions, panels or groups — have acquired a wealth

³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, Organization of American States, among others.

of experience in tackling the issue at hand, taking on board lessons learned, and working together.

64. Since trafficking networks now operate at both national and international levels, bilateral and multilateral coordination must, in turn, be strengthened in order to achieve greater effectiveness in dealing with cases, preventing trafficking, and prosecuting and punishing traffickers.

65. Work to combat trafficking in persons has been carried out jointly through permanent forums such as the Central American Integration System (SICA) and the Regional Conference on Migration, but greater coordination among these national platforms is required at operational level in dealing with specific cases.

66. For this to happen, however, a forum where public officials can meet and can exchange their ideas and the lessons they have learned must be established as a matter of urgency with a view to the creation of mechanisms for coordination and follow-up of specific transnational cases.

67. The work carried out by international bodies has been fundamental in the progress made by countries in combating trafficking in persons. The technical and financial support provided by these agencies, together with the clear commitment on the part of Governments to combating this problem, has proven to be key factors in the achievements made in the region in this area.

68. In the last two years, Costa Rica has pioneered inter-agency coordination to optimize the use of international aid and avoid duplication of work. To this end, between 11 and 13 November 2008, Costa Rica held the first Meeting of National Coalitions against Trafficking in Persons in the Central American Region, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. Representatives from Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Mexico attended, with the aim of fostering an increased exchange of experiences and cross-border coordination among the national platforms established in Central American countries to combat this crime.

69. The objective is to create a framework for regional activities to combat and prevent trafficking in persons — particularly trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation — and to care for victims in Central America (the regional public good). The five Central American countries participating in this project (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) identified the need to work together to define regional standards, policies and procedures to combat and prevent trafficking in persons and improve the provision of care to victims of this crime, particularly women and minors of both sexes.
