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SATELLITES, DATA AND USERS IN MOBILITY: THE VISIBILITY OF SPACE FOR COMBATTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Abstract

The illegal business of human trafficking takes many forms, all of which see good-intentioned efforts to counter this long-lasting and developing adversity of humanity. From not-for-profits to intergovernmental organisations, drafters of domestic legislation to international treaties, federal law enforcement agencies to international forums, all such anti-trafficking efforts have an involvement in one way or another in the prevention and disturbance of the widely practiced involuntary use of persons. This paper examines the extent to which such anti-trafficking efforts apply or depend on space applications in their operations. The study begins by discussing the importance of remote sensing, telecommunications and position, navigation and timing applications in the projects combatting human trafficking, abduction and slavery. Upon assessing how each of the three space-derived applications is applied to the operations of anti-trafficking efforts, the paper considers how space service providers and space policy-makers can develop and promote their systems or end-user segments to better serve the needs of such efforts. Consideration is also given to how the actors in the human-trafficking industry use space applications themselves in their illegal activities. Where anti-trafficking efforts may better harness space applications in the interest of their missions, the paper examines how the benefits of space activities can be effectively communicated to the end-users. For example, discussion is explored on the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs' communication of the importance of space applications to the stakeholders of anti-trafficking efforts, particularly through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals numbers 5, 8, 10 and 16. The reception from space service providers and end users of these Sustainable Development Goals, and other initiatives reflecting a similar purpose, is also explored. Ultimately, the paper aims to provide an overview on the dynamics of space applications from ground and space segments to the end-user in supporting anti-trafficking efforts. It intends to communicate to the diversity of experts among the space community how their operations apply to the significance and adverse effects of human trafficking. In doing so, space-derived solutions, both existing and upcoming, may be further promoted to and employed in anti-trafficking efforts. Through such an endeavour, space can reinforce its ability to benefit all countries and contribute to the peace and security of humanity.