



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

*Synod Hall
Thursday, 11 April 2019*

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Thank you for inviting me to meet with you at the end of your Conference dedicated to the implementation of the *Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking*, prepared by the Section for Migrants and Refugees of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and approved by me. I thank Father Michael Czerny for his words of greeting on behalf of all the participants.

“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (*Jn 10:10*). These words of the Gospel of John summarize the mission of Jesus: to offer the fullness of life to all men and women of every age, according to the plan of the Father. The Son of God became man to show all human beings the path to realizing their humanity, in conformity with each person’s uniqueness and unrepeatability.

Tragically, our world today is marked by situations that hinder the fulfilment of this mission. As pointed out by the *Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking*, “our times have witnessed a growth of individualism and egocentricity, attitudes that tend to regard others through a lens of cool utility, valuing them according to criteria of convenience and personal benefit” (§17).

It is essentially this tendency to commodify the other, which I have repeatedly denounced^[1]. Trafficking in persons is one of the most dramatic manifestations of this commodification. In its many forms, it constitutes “an open wound on the body of contemporary society”^[2], a profound injury to the humanity of those who suffer it and to its perpetrators. Trafficking profoundly disfigures the humanity of the victim, offending his or her freedom and

dignity. Yet at the same time, it dehumanizes those who carry it out, denying them access to “life in abundance”. Finally, trafficking seriously damages humanity as a whole, tearing apart the human family as well as the Body of Christ.

Trafficking, as I said, represents an unjustifiable violation of the freedom and dignity of its victims, of those constitutive dimensions of the human being as willed and created by God. For this reason, it is to be considered a crime against humanity^[3]. Of this, there can be no doubt. The same gravity, by analogy, must be attributed to all forms of contempt for the freedom and dignity of every human being, whether a compatriot or a foreigner.

Those guilty of this crime cause harm not only to others but also to themselves. For each of us is created to love and care for others, and this culminates in the gift of self: “No one has greater love than this: to give one’s life for one’s friends” (*Jn 15:13*). In our relationships with others, we play out our humanity, approaching or moving away from the model of human being desired by God the Father and revealed in his incarnate Son. Therefore, every choice contrary to the realization of God’s project for us is a betrayal of our humanity and renounces that “life in abundance” offered by Jesus Christ. It is to take the down staircase, to debase ourselves, to become animals.

All actions that aim to restore and promote our humanity and that of others are in line with the Church’s mission, as a continuation of the saving mission of Christ. This missionary value is evident in the struggle against all forms of trafficking and in every commitment to the redemption of the survivors; a struggle and a commitment that also have beneficial effects on our own humanity, opening the way to the fullness of life, the ultimate purpose of our existence

Your presence, dear brothers and sisters, is a tangible sign of the generous commitment of many local Churches in this pastoral area. The numerous initiatives which put you at the forefront of efforts to prevent trafficking, protect survivors and prosecute offenders, are worthy of admiration. I feel I should express special thanks to the many religious congregations that have worked and continue to work, also through networking, as the “front line” of the Church’s missionary action against all forms of trafficking.

Much has been done and is being done; yet much remains to be done. Faced with human trafficking, a phenomenon as complex as it is dark, it is essential to ensure the coordination of various pastoral initiatives, both locally and internationally. The offices established by local Churches, religious congregations and Catholic organizations, are called to share their experience and knowledge, join forces and coordinate their activity regarding the countries of origin, transit and destination of those who are trafficked.

To make its action more adequate and effective, the Church should welcome the help of other political and social actors. Engagement in structured collaborations with public institutions and civil society organizations will guarantee more effective and longer-lasting results.

I offer heartfelt thanks for all that you are already doing on behalf of our many brothers and sisters who are the innocent victims of the commodification of the human person. Let us say this loud and clear: the commodification of the human person. We must say this and emphasize it because it is the truth. I encourage you to persevere in this mission, which is often risky and anonymous. Risky indeed for lay persons, but also for religious. It is risky because even within the congregation there are those who look at you askance! (I see the Sisters are nodding yes). It is risky, but we have to persevere. It is anonymous, but precisely because of this, an irrefutable proof of your selfless generosity.

Through the intercession of Saint Josephine Bakhita, who was enslaved as a child, sold and bought, but was eventually liberated and then “flourished” in fullness as a daughter of God, I pray for you. Upon all of you and on those who are committed to the struggle against human trafficking, I invoke abundant blessings. I will keep thinking of you and I pray for you. And you, please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

[1] Cf. *Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture*, 7 February 2015; *General Audience*, 22 April 2015; Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, 54; *Address to the Italian Antimafia Parliamentary Commission*, 21 September 2017.

[2] *Address to Participants in the International Conference on Combatting Human Trafficking*, 10 April 2014.

[3] Cf. *Address to a Group of Ambassadors on the occasion of their Presentation of their Letters of Credence*, 12 December 2013; *Address to the Delegation of the International Association of Penal Law*, 23 October 2014; *Message to Participants in the Conference on Human Trafficking organized by the “Santa Marta Group”*, 30-31 October 2015; *Address to the Second European Assembly of RENATE*, 7 November 2016; *Remarks to Participants in the World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action against Human Trafficking*, 12 February 2018; *Address in the Pre-Synodal Meeting with Young People*, 19 March 2018; *Video Message to Participants in the International Forum on Modern Slavery*, 5-8 May 2018; *Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences*, 12 November 2018; *Greeting to Members of the Galileo Foundation*, 8 February 2019.