



THE HOLY SEE
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Working Session 6: Combating Trafficking in Human Beings,
With a Particular Focus on Trafficking in Children
Saturday, November 27, 2010

Madam Moderator,

1. Children have a right to an innocent childhood. Children are by nature lovely, innocent, and trusting of adults, yet some of them are today increasingly robbed of their very childhood. They are preyed upon by media, market forces, and people who exploit them sexually. But children are the very hope and future of society, and must be protected and helped in every respect.

Unfortunately, however, today millions of people are victims of trafficking, of which, over 70%, almost all women and girls, are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. This reality is both tragic and inexcusable. The transnational trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation is based on a co-modification of human life that facilitates the supply of victims from sending countries and the demand for victims in receiving countries. For this reason, laws against prostitution, child pornography and sexual exploitation need to be strengthened in order to better protect women and children. The human person is not something to be traded for any purpose!

Sexual exploitation of children is a crime so heinous that one is at a loss to express his or her reactions and feelings. Both trafficking in women and children, sex tourism, and child pornography on the internet have increased enormously in recent times. The combination of an amoral free market and sexual decadence, and poverty and weak family structures explain this shocking truth.

2. In the view of the Holy See, there can be no tolerance of commercial exploitation of children, either in the name of free expression or free choice. We must be attentive to any attempt to relativize the crimes here committed. Sexual abuse is evil, a criminal act, and punishable. We must gather much more political will to combat these crimes against our weakest, and we must strengthen both international law, instruments of extradition and extra-territoriality.

3. There are threats posed by media, internet, and the general sexual decadence of our society. The “sexualization” of childhood, driven by market forces,

contributes to robbing children of their natural innocence. The presentation of sex as something normal at an ever earlier age, also leads to a “sexualization” of childhood which, in turn, invites abusers and may even allow them to seek “normalization” and legitimacy of their crimes.

4. The combination of poverty and weak family relations often explains why children are involved in ‘sex tourism’ or become the victims of trafficking. Poverty must and can be combated through more development aid. Here both international organizations and local communities must have a say. The shameful sex tourism in many developing countries must be combated on the supply side as well as on the demand side. The poor family in the developing world can and must be helped, and the clients-exploiters can and must be detected and punished effectively through international legal cooperation. Both sex tourism and internet child pornography are global phenomena, and must be combated with truly global political weapons.

5. But above all the main strategy to fight commercial sex abuse of children is to strengthen the family. Although sexual abuse of children sadly also happens in the family context, as a main rule it is in the family that the child is taught what a natural mother-father-child relationship is. Only in the family can the child have the necessary protection against those who do not have the best interest of the child in mind. We must now face up to the fact that not only are poor children from failed or poor nations abused, but also children from the very heart of Western society, with its affluence and consumer richness. Family break-down and weakening happens, while society becomes more predatory in the area of sexuality. As research shows, child abusers are not only pedophiles, but also adolescents and adults who have a thwarted view of sexuality. The combination of sex and violence in media, entertainment, and the normalization of sexual experimentation easily lead to perversions that involve abuse not only of women, but especially of children.

Once we see human beings as objects, once we forget that they have been created by God with an unalienable dignity, they can simply be used and abused. Sexual abuse of children is the logical extreme of such a view of the human being. Therefore, we must analyze the root causes of this crime while at the same time we must fight its occurrence. The Holy See will do its part, according to its specific nature and competence, to combat the evil of commercial sexual abuse of children, a crime that must never be compromised with or excused. We must look deeply in our own societies, confronting the lack of sound sexual behaviour, the dominance of a consumerist culture that sees human beings as objects, and the licentiousness of some media which speculate in violence and sexual perversions. We must react as citizens, and as politicians, to ensure moral standards in our states and in international society.

Thank you, Madam Moderator.