



HOLY SEE

Statement by Monsignor Michael Banach
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the OSCE
At the 2008 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
8 October 2008, Warsaw

During Working Session 14: Identification, Assistance and Access to Justice for Victims of Trafficking

Mr. Moderator,

The scourge of trafficking in persons is a multi-dimensional social phenomenon of misery, poverty, greed, corruption, injustice and oppression which manifests itself in sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery, and the recruitment of minors for armed conflict. We know well that the root causes of this phenomenon include economic factors, such as the imbalance between rural and urban wealth levels and the desperate desire to escape poverty. Juridical and political factors also contribute to the problem, such as the absence of legislation, and the ignorance of parents and trafficked persons of their rights under the law. Mistrust of the law and open borders likewise play a part, as do socio-cultural factors, such as the social acceptability of putting children to work outside of the family, illiteracy or low education levels, acceptance of debt bondage and discrimination against girls. Globalization and the increased movement of people can also make vulnerable groups, such as women and girls, easier prey for traffickers, who clearly have no regard for the dignity of the human person, and who view people as mere commodities to be bought and sold, used and abused at will.

Human trafficking is fundamentally a human rights problem that requires an equally multi-dimensional response of prevention, education and awareness, assistance to victims, and professional development. The Holy See remains deeply concerned about this problem in the human family. It has called for concrete measures on the part of States and NGOs alike to assist the victims, but also to address the macro-economic issues that often perpetuate the cycle of trafficking and keep victims in the bondage of slavery. Clearly, it is necessary for governments and civil society to work together to promote the integration of victims into healthy and meaningful ways of life that respect their dignity as persons, including by providing medical care and psycho-social counselling, accommodation, residence permits and access to employment. In certain cases this means developing instruments of micro-credit, so that victims do not return to the same circumstances which made trafficking possible in the first place.

Acknowledging the right to compensation for victims, and the creation of compensation schemes; the punishment of individuals and groups who exploit victims, including the confiscation of profits and property obtained through trafficking activities; the adoption of legislation and

consequently enforcement, including workplace inspections; further reflection on macro-economic measures, and the implementation of policies which allow third country nationals to enter countries and work, according to the demand of labor in that country, must all be part and parcel of ongoing efforts to combat trafficking in persons.

The Holy See is pleased to note that in many different countries the Church is involved in assisting victims, offering support to escape from sexual violence and forced labor, and reaching out to child soldiers, creating safe houses, providing counselling services aimed at integration into society and helping them to return in a sustainable way to their home country. Moreover, prevention and awareness activities are being carried out, in particular, by congregations of women religious. Catholic agencies such as *Caritas* and *COATNET* (Catholic Network against Trafficking in Women), for example, have recently developed strategic frameworks focusing on emergency situations, peace building, human development, and confederated structures which include a proactive commitment to combat trafficking of persons in all its forms, including by advocating for the rights and for the protection of trafficked persons, for effective anti-trafficking legislation and measures, for effective reinforcement of such legislation and measures; by advocating for migration policies and economic policies that reduce vulnerability of people to trafficking, and by networking with authorities, churches, and with relevant actors in international civil society, to jointly elaborate effective partnerships to challenge the human trafficking phenomenon.

Finally, the Holy See would like to recall that while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. The words of Pope Benedict XVI could not be more appropriate to this discussion today: “We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care...They need heartfelt concern. Those who work for the Church’s charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity.”¹

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2006), n. 31.