



THE HOLY SEE
2015 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Working Session 11: Humanitarian issues and other commitments:
Combating Trafficking in Human Beings
Monday, September 28, 2015

Mr. Moderator,

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”, no person may ever be used by another as a means to an end. Upholding this inalienable principle is a primary duty for everyone – governmental leaders and citizens – and must be the broad-ranging foundation for culture as it is experienced and shared among all human beings. Unfortunately, we note with distress that reality is often far from this ideal.

My delegation follows with particular closeness and interest all matters related to the trafficking in human beings. Not only does the Holy See express concern and solidarity with victims, but it remains vigilant of the political actions of governments, that they be not only respectful of the individual human person and of the common good, but also that political solutions and governmental actions be adopted speedily and comprehensively.

Pope Francis has repeatedly raised his voice emphasising the urgent need to fight effectively the trafficking in human beings and persists tirelessly in considering this issue as being of the highest importance. The Holy See observes that even though the international community has adopted numerous agreements aimed at ending slavery in all its forms, and has launched various strategies to combat this phenomenon, despite international and national legislation, millions of men, women and children are subjugated to slavery and trafficking, both formally and informally. Whether in countries with regulations which fail to meet international norms or in countries where legal protection for worker’s rights are ignored, the reality of slavery and trafficking is a phenomenon which continues unabated as countries and traffickers reduce human life to a mere commodity in the name of meeting economic demand.

In order to counteract such widespread phenomena, a renewed commitment to prevention is of fundamental importance. In this regard, it is necessary to recognize that the leading factor driving those longing for a better future into the hands of those preying upon the vulnerability of the poor and the defenseless is itself extreme poverty. Such persons, prompted by a genuine desire to provide for themselves and their needy families, all too easily become unwitting victims of those who make false promises of a better future in another country or community. Our efforts to address human trafficking are inherently linked, therefore, to our determination to address poverty eradication and lack of equal economic opportunity.

Trafficking in human beings can constitute a crime against humanity and traffickers in these cases should be prosecuted on the basis of clear international and national laws, including, inter alia, the confiscation of profits derived from their illicit activities, and the victims ought to be fully compensated from such funds.

It is our common obligation to eradicate this grave violation of human rights and to strive to ensure that all human beings co-exist in freedom, equality, harmony and peace, in accordance with the values common to our shared humanity. With the support of academics and of moral and religious leaders, together with the influence of a global movement and social networks, we must expose these often hidden crimes through the use of technology and working through reputable national and international institutions.

Particularly through its work on the ground – in communities, through parishes, religious institutes, and in a special way through its women religious ministering around the globe, Caritas, associations and NGOs of Catholic inspiration – the Catholic Church is committed in all corners of the world to accommodating and defending potential and actual victims of trafficking or of other forms of exploitation.

These practical efforts foster rehabilitation through projects which acknowledge the human dignity of each person and aim at professional formation and occupation in the labour force. Certain concrete projects aim to combat criminal activities and to create a culture of awareness. These practical projects are a way of building that kind of justice which is, or which ought to be, the foundation of every democracy.

Much has been done to counteract human trafficking, but there are still many gaps in the public perception of this phenomenon, especially when dealing with labour exploitation and the trafficking of minors who are made to beg or become victims of organ harvesting.

In the words of Pope Francis: “Human trafficking is a crime against humanity. We must unite our efforts to free the victims and stop this increasingly aggressive crime which threatens not only individuals but the basic values of society and of international security and justice, to say nothing of the economy, and the fabric of the family and our coexistence” (*Address of Pope Francis on the occasion of the Presentation of the Letters of Credence*, 12 December 2013).

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.