

HOLY SEE

Statement by Monsignor Anthony R. Frontiero
At the 2007 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
2 October 2007, Warsaw

During Working Session 12: Humanitarian Issues and other Commitments;
Trafficking in Human Beings

Mr. Chairman,

The practice of trafficking in human beings must be exposed for what it is: a dark, shameful, harmful, and tragic problem within the human family that threatens, and in many cases destroys, the lives of countless men, women and children every year. It strikes both developed and developing countries with devastating effects on individuals, families, and the whole social fabric. The root causes of trafficking are well known: poverty, discrimination, underdevelopment, corruption, and economic and social degradation. Other factors are not so well known: the breakdown of the family, the weakening of traditional ways of life which for generations have passed on cultural values and given meaning to daily existence,¹ addiction, and numerous other social factors, not the least of which is a psychological need to escape from the hardships and painful responsibilities of life. These factors are all part of this phenomenon which continues to lure people away from true human fulfilment and into a web of deception, abuse, and eventual destruction.

The activities of the ODIHR and other OSCE institutions and field operations have called attention to the grave consequences of this human scourge. Meetings like this one have been held, studies have been undertaken, and other means have been employed. The Holy See has been pleased to take an active part in these initiatives. There is, however, another side to the darkness of trafficking that has yet to be exposed in an open and honest way: the *demand side* of trafficking. While efforts are being made to prevent the trafficking in human beings through the formation of *laws and policies*, commensurate efforts must also be made in the formation of *consciences*. Perhaps what is needed most is for people everywhere to embrace an authentic conception of the human person, and to recognize the fundamental dignity of *every* person created by God. What is needed is a new outlook, a new mindset, where every person is enabled to first of all see themselves as worthy, as dignified, as deserving to be treated like a person, and not as an object. Somehow engendering that level of self-respect, and then translating that self-respect into a respect for the dignity of the other person before us, is key to changing the tide of trafficking.

The ever present call for political will, laws and legislation, will be a stop-gap for human trafficking if developed and implemented in transparent ways; but these will only truly serve the human family if they are based upon a rule of law that recognizes the fundamental dignity of the human person.

Catholic Social Teaching has consistently taught that every person, believer or not, has been fashioned in the image and likeness of God and is called to be an artisan and co-creator of society

¹ Cf. *Message of His Holiness John Paul II on the Occasion of the International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking*, 516-17.

and culture.² This fundamental principle has led to the articulation of several other values that are constitutive to peace and security in the world, values such as the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, the preferential option for the poor, justice, and an integral humanism. These values, among others, communicated effectively through faith traditions and religious experience can serve to assist in the building of a new mindset, where it becomes possible to resist the temptation to reduce the human person to a mere object, a commodity or a consumer, which is the final result of every form of trafficking. If indeed violence, greed, corruption, inordinate sexual desires, addiction, fear, and insecurity are the inclinations that lead to trafficking in humans, an antidote to this problem would clearly be consciences free from fear, greed, corruption, addiction, etc...

This conviction of “faith in action” can be witnessed on the ground, as numerous voluntary Catholic organizations and Christian associations, for example, have made it their business to raise the awareness of the problem of trafficking and to set up assistance and victim protection, in many cases long before State authorities have done so. It is often the members of faith communities, who, committed to Gospel values, find themselves on the front lines taking care of victims and performing a range of actions, from healthcare to spiritual assistance. In many cases, the service of people of faith in this regard is complemented by the action of public institutions and government bodies; in other instances, they stand alone, often in silence and in very dangerous situations.

Movements for peace, human rights, and social justice among faith communities and other NGOs have the capacity to create a new consciousness, not only among the people engaged in them, but even within societies where the dark values that support trafficking in persons seem to be dominant. Faith-based approaches to peace, human rights and justice, inspire people to be conscious of their power to act as social agents against the forces that view people as mere objects of manual labor or sexual pleasure, keeping them in the bondage of terror; against forces that would seduce young people into the false and empty promises of drug addiction, for example; diminishing human strength and moral fiber, undermining esteemed values, and destroying the will to live. The instrument of change that is necessary to turn the nightmare of human trafficking into the dream of peace and authentic human flourishing, free from bondage, greed, and corruption, is people—people with converted hearts and minds; who embrace the truth about God, and the truth about themselves and others; and who, with the help of God, can muster up the courage to witness in word and in deed to a better way.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

² Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 105, 106.