

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE FRANCIS  
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE 2015**  
*No Longer Slaves, But Brothers And Sisters*

8 December 2014

[Link](#)

[...] I think also of the living conditions of many migrants who, in their dramatic odyssey, experience hunger, are deprived of freedom, robbed of their possessions, or undergo physical and sexual abuse. In a particular way, I think of those among them who, upon arriving at their destination after a gruelling journey marked by fear and insecurity, are detained in at times inhumane conditions. I think of those among them, who for different social, political and economic reasons, are forced to live clandestinely. My thoughts also turn to those who, in order to remain within the law, agree to disgraceful living and working conditions, especially in those cases where the laws of a nation create or permit a structural dependency of migrant workers on their employers, as, for example, when the legality of their residency is made dependent on their labour contract. Yes, I am thinking of "slave labour".[...]

[...] Nor can I fail to think of all those persons, minors and adults alike, who are made objects of trafficking for the sale of organs, for recruitment as soldiers, for begging, for illegal activities such as the production and sale of narcotics, or for disguised forms of cross-border adoption.[...]

[...] Alongside this deeper cause – the rejection of another person's humanity – there are other causes which help to explain contemporary forms of slavery. Among these, I think in the first place of poverty, underdevelopment and exclusion, especially when combined with a lack of access to education or scarce, even non-existent, employment opportunities. Not infrequently, the victims of human trafficking and slavery are people who look for a way out of a situation of extreme poverty; taken in by false promises of employment, they often end up in the hands of criminal networks which organize human trafficking. These networks are skilled in using modern means of communication as a way of luring young men and women in various parts of the world.

Another cause of slavery is corruption on the part of people willing to do anything for financial gain. Slave labour and human trafficking often require the complicity of intermediaries, be they law enforcement personnel, state officials, or civil and military institutions. "This occurs when money, and not the human person, is at the centre of an economic system. Yes, the person, made in the image of God and charged with dominion over all creation, must be at the centre of every social or economic system. When the person is replaced by mammon, a subversion of values occurs".<sup>[4]</sup> [...]

[...] Often, when considering the reality of human trafficking, illegal trafficking of migrants and other acknowledged or unacknowledged forms of slavery, one has the impression that they occur within a context of general indifference.

Sadly, this is largely true. Yet I would like to mention the enormous and often silent efforts which have been made for many years by religious congregations, especially women's congregations, to provide support to victims. These institutes work in very difficult situations, dominated at times by violence, as they work to break the invisible chains binding victims to traffickers and exploiters. Those chains are made up of a series of links, each composed of clever psychological ploys which make the victims dependent on their exploiters. This is accomplished by blackmail and threats made against them and their loved ones, but also by concrete acts such as the confiscation of their identity documents and physical violence. The activity of religious congregations is carried out in three main areas: in offering assistance to victims, in working for their psychological and educational rehabilitation, and in efforts to reintegrate them into the society where they live or from which they have come.[...]

[...] Intergovernmental organizations, in keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, are called to coordinate initiatives for combating the transnational networks of organized crime which oversee the trafficking of persons and the illegal trafficking of migrants. Cooperation is clearly needed at a number of levels, involving national and international institutions, agencies of civil society and the world of finance.

[...] Businesses<sup>[5]</sup> have a duty to ensure dignified working conditions and adequate salaries for their employees, but they must also be vigilant that forms of subjugation or human trafficking do not find their way into the distribution chain. Together with the social responsibility of businesses, there is also the social responsibility of consumers. Every person ought to have the awareness that "purchasing is always a moral – and not simply an economic – act".<sup>[6]</sup> [...]

[...] In recent years, the Holy See, attentive to the pain of the victims of trafficking and the voice of the religious congregations which assist them on their path to freedom, has increased its appeals to the international community for cooperation and collaboration between different agencies in putting an end to this scourge. Meetings have also been organized to draw attention to the phenomenon of human trafficking and to facilitate cooperation between various agencies, including experts from the universities and international organizations, police forces from migrants' countries of origin, transit, or destination, and representatives of ecclesial groups which work with victims. It is my hope that these efforts will continue to expand in years to come.

In her "proclamation of the truth of Christ's love in society"<sup>[7]</sup>, the Church constantly engages in charitable activities inspired by the truth of the human person. She is charged with showing to all the path to conversion, which enables us to change the way we see our neighbours, to recognize in every other person a brother or sister in our human family, and to acknowledge his or her intrinsic dignity in truth and freedom. This can be clearly seen from the story of Josephine Bakhita, the saint originally from the Darfur region in Sudan who was kidnapped by slave-traffickers and sold to brutal masters when she was nine years old. Subsequently – as a result of painful experiences – she became a "free daughter of

God" thanks to her faith, lived in religious consecration and in service to others, especially the most lowly and helpless. This saint, who lived at the turn of the twentieth century, is even today an exemplary witness of hope for the many victims of slavery; she can support the efforts of all those committed to fighting against this "open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ".[\[8\]](#)

In the light of all this, I invite everyone, in accordance with his or her specific role and responsibilities, to practice acts of fraternity towards those kept in a state of enslavement. Let us ask ourselves, as individuals and as communities, whether we feel challenged when, in our daily lives, we meet or deal with persons who could be victims of human trafficking, or when we are tempted to select items which may well have been produced by exploiting others. Some of us, out of indifference, or financial reasons, or because we are caught up in our daily concerns, close our eyes to this. Others, however, decide to do something about it, to join civic associations or to practice small, everyday gestures – which have so much merit! – such as offering a kind word, a greeting or a smile. These cost us nothing but they can offer hope, open doors, and change the life of another person who lives clandestinely; they can also change our own lives with respect to this reality.[...]