

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS  
TO THE NEW AMBASSADORS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LETTERS OF CREDENCE**  
*Clementine Hall*

*12 December 2013*

[Link](#)

[...] Meeting with you, my thoughts first turn to the international community, to the numerous initiatives undertaken to promote peace and dialogue, so as to foster better cultural, political, economic relations, and to provide assistance to peoples tried by various difficulties. Today, there is one area I would like to consider with you which concerns me deeply and which currently threatens the dignity of persons, namely, human trafficking. Such trafficking is a true form of slavery, unfortunately more and more widespread, which concerns every country, even the most developed. It is a reality which affects the most vulnerable in society: women of all ages, children, the handicapped, the poorest, and those who come from broken families and from difficult situations in society. In a particular way, we Christians recognize in them the face of Jesus Christ, who identified himself with the least and those most in need. Others, who do not profess a religious faith, in the name of our common humanity share our compassion for their sufferings and strive to liberate them and alleviate their wounds. Together we can and must employ our energies so that these women, men and children can be freed, thus putting an end to this horrible trade. It is believed that there are millions of victims of forced labour, victims of human trafficking for the purposes of manual work and of sexual exploitation. This cannot continue. It constitutes a grave violation of the human rights of those victimized and is an offense against their dignity, as well as a defeat for the worldwide community. People of good will, whether or not they profess religious beliefs, must not allow these women, men and children to be treated as objects, to be deceived, raped, often sold and resold for various purposes, and in the end either killed or left devastated in mind and body, only to be finally thrown away or abandoned. It is shameful.

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.

What is called for, then, is a shared sense of responsibility and firmer political will to gain victory on this front. Responsibility is required towards those who have fallen victim to trafficking in order to protect their rights, to guarantee their safety and that of their families, and to prevent the corrupt and criminals from escaping justice and having the last word over the lives of others. Suitable legislative intervention in the countries of origin, transit and arrival, which will also facilitate orderly migration, can diminish this grave problem.

Governments and the international community, upon whom it chiefly falls to prevent and avert this situation, have not failed to take measures at various levels

to stop it, and to protect and provide help to the victims of this crime, which, not infrequently is related to the narcotics and arms trade, the transport of undocumented migrants, and organized crime. It must be admitted, sadly, that sometimes workers in the public sector and members of organizations involved in peace missions have also had a part in it. In order to achieve positive results, the efforts to combat human trafficking must also be effective on the cultural level and through communications. It is precisely on this level that we need to make a good examination of conscience: how many times have we permitted a human being to be seen as an object, to be put on show in order to sell a product or to satisfy an immoral desire? The human person ought never to be sold or bought as if he or she were a commodity. Whoever uses human persons in this way and exploits them, even if indirectly, becomes an accomplice of this injustice.

Your Excellencies, it has been my intention to share with you these thoughts regarding a social scourge of our time, because I believe in the value and the power of a concerted commitment to combat it. I therefore urge the international community to devise a more united and effective strategy against human trafficking so that, in every part of the world, men and women may never be used as instruments, but always be respected in their inviolable dignity.[...]