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# **Practical Solutions To Eradicate Human Trafficking**

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**Opening Remarks by Archbishop Bernardito Auza,  
Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations  
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Your Excellencies,  
Leaders in the fight to end human trafficking and modern slavery,  
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you today for this conference on practical solutions to eradicate human trafficking. I thank the Permanent Observer Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta for catalyzing this conversation and for inviting the Holy See, together with the Permanent Mission of Ireland, the International Labor Organization, and the Santa Marta Group, to co-sponsor it.

Next month the international community will be marking the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration emphasizes that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person," and that "no one shall be held in slavery or servitude." Yet more than 40 million people today are ensnared by various forms of so-called modern slavery.

The international community, national governments and civil society have made substantial progress in recent years in recognizing the dimensions of the problem and increasing the resolve, the resources and the institutions to combat it. But despite the noteworthy achievements of the Palermo Protocols, the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, the inclusion of targets 5.2, 8.7 and 16.2 in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and many other national, international and civil society initiatives, across the globe the number of those enslaved for sexual exploitation, forced labour or organ harvesting sadly continues to skyrocket. The gap between our commitments and efforts and the horrors confronting victims of this "atrocious scourge," "crime against humanity," and "open wound on the body of contemporary society," to use Pope Francis' words, is increasing, not closing.

When Pope Francis came to the United Nations in September 2015, he said that plagues like “human trafficking, the marketing of human organs and tissues, the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, slave labor, including prostitution,” and other evils cannot be met by “solemn commitments” alone. We have to ensure, he underlined, that our efforts are “truly effective in the struggle against all of these scourges.” Today’s conference on practical solutions is a needed step in that direction.

The Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, reassessed last year, is organized around four objectives, often referred to as the four Ps: to prevent trafficking in persons by addressing what drives it; to protect and assist victims; to prosecute those involved in the crime of trafficking; and to promote partnerships among governmental institutions and all the stakeholders to eradicate trafficking and rehabilitate survivors. These four Ps provide a helpful schema to examine, practically, where we need to do better.

There has been significant progress in identifying and addressing many of the social, economic, cultural, political and other factors that make people vulnerable to human trafficking, in formulating comprehensive policies and programs, and in developing educational and awareness-raising campaigns. At the same time, however, several of the drivers of vulnerability have worsened, in particular armed conflicts that provoke enormous humanitarian emergencies and forced migration, and the refugee crisis, both of which have exacerbated the dramatic situation faced by people, especially women and children. But there is a huge need for honesty and commitment with regard to examining and addressing the demand that fosters trafficking, especially the economic realities and avarice that catalyze labor trafficking and sexual exploitation that dehumanize and commodify other persons as mere objects of gratification. We must become far more practical, even ruthless, in addressing not just the evil fruit but also the roots of the problem. And this requires, honestly, the courage to have ethical conversations in a relativist age and to name forthrightly the harmful consequences, to subjects, victims and society as a whole from addiction to money or to sex. The Holy See and the Catholic Church is very committed to engaging in this conversation.

Concerning the protection and assistance of victims, there is now greater awareness and legal recognition that those being trafficked are indeed victims rather than “silent partners” or, even worse, perpetrators of crime. More services are in place to identify and liberate victims from the clutches of modern slavery, regularize their situation and put them on the path to recovery. But the number and length of programs for rehabilitation and reintegration are still far from what is needed to provide the healing and training necessary for the victims to begin anew a normal, productive and autonomous life. Catholic women’s religious communities in many countries have been among the practical leaders on the ground in this most important work.

With regard to the prosecution of crimes of trafficking in persons, there have been various advances in terms of formulating adequate legal instruments to investigate, prosecute and punish traffickers, unlocking the financial chains, understanding the connection to other forms of organized crime and corruption, and fostering cooperation at and across borders. But as multiple studies have shown us, there are still very few convictions and widespread practical impunity. The Catholic Church, through initiatives like the Santa Marta Group, an international alliance of police chiefs and bishops working together, at all levels, to promote coordination between law enforcement and faith-based

organizations, is attempting to try to make a dent in that problem by assisting the work of law enforcement, details of which I anticipate Kevin Hyland, one of the founding members of the Santa Marta Group, will be able to provide today at greater length.

Finally, there has also been progress in the formation of partnerships to strengthen collective action among governments and governmental agencies, academic institutions and the media, civil society and the private sector. These partnerships are where much of the creativity in the fight against trafficking and modern slavery originate and it is urgent that these partnerships grow. Here I would like to mention Talitha Kum, an international network of 22 institutes of Catholic religious sisters across 70 countries on five continents, in big cities and the most rural areas. These communities work together at a practical level with each other, with other civil society groups, and with governments to try to address the multiplicity of concrete issues that are involved in combatting trafficking. Their witness and work provide an example for Catholic and non-Catholic institutions across the globe of the type of good alliances and solidarity necessary to combat the organized crime and corruption that make trafficking possible and profitable.

In 2015, Pope Francis dedicated his annual Message for the World Day of Prayer for Peace to human trafficking. He stressed, “We are facing a global phenomenon that exceeds the competence of any one community or country,” and therefore, “we need a mobilization comparable in size to that of the phenomenon itself.” We’re all part of that mobilization. And for our efforts to be commensurate to the challenge, our resolve must become ever more practical, as we will discuss in great depth today.

Thank you.