

VIENNA FORUM ON THE FIGHT AGAINST
"TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS"

ADDRESS OF H.E. MSGR. AGOSTINO MARCHETTO

Vienna
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Mr Chairman,

The Holy See appreciates the efforts undertaken at various levels to combat human trafficking, which is a multidimensional problem and one of the most shameful phenomena of our era. In fact, trafficking in human beings is a dreadful offence against human dignity, which the social doctrine of the Catholic Church regards as the foundation of human rights.

It is well known that poverty, as well as the lack of opportunities and of social cohesion, push people to look for a better future despite the related risks, making them extremely vulnerable to trafficking.

Moreover, it should be emphasized that, nowadays, several factors contribute to the spread of this crime, namely, the absence of specific rules in some countries, the victims' ignorance of their own rights, the socio-cultural structure and armed conflicts.

The Holy See encourages all kinds of just initiatives aimed at eradicating this immoral and criminal phenomenon and at promoting the welfare of the victims. The Palermo Protocol and the successive regional Conventions have introduced an exhaustive international legislation against trafficking in human beings.

Moreover, the Holy See notes with satisfaction the coming into force, at the beginning of this month, of the Council of Europe's Convention against trafficking in human beings.

The Holy See has been constantly aware of the seriousness of the crime of trafficking in human beings.

In 1970, Pope Paul VI established a Pontifical Commission (now a Council) for the Pastoral Care of Migrant and Itinerant People, which monitors also the issue of the victims of human trafficking, considered to be the slaves of modern times.

In this perspective, the same Pontifical Council has organised two World Congresses: the first, for the liberation of women of the street and the second, for the children of the street (See *People on the Move*, n. 102 Suppl. and n. 98 Suppl.).

These Congresses resulted in the publication of the *Guidelines for the pastoral care of the road-street* (See *People on the Move* n. 104 Suppl., published in six languages), which contain concrete suggestions, including many actions that have already been accomplished to fight against trafficking of human beings.

Because of the presence of the Catholic Church at both universal and local levels, the action of the aforementioned Pontifical Council consists especially in encouraging the various Conferences of Bishops throughout the world to fight against human trafficking with the participation of religious women and men, lay people, various Catholic associations and movements, etc.

Among other things, the Holy See has stated that all efforts to tackle criminal activities and to protect the victims of people involved in trafficking should include "both men and women and place human rights at the centre of all strategies".

The demand side of sexual exploitation, "customers' - ordinary men: young men, husbands and fathers -, also needs to be addressed; this requires a better knowledge of motives in order to address the reasons why women are misused".

A similar attitude should be applied to other forms of trafficking: for example, illicit forms of subcontracting activities that profit from exploitative labour conditions.

At the local level, these points have been taken up by a number of Bishops' Conferences (for example, Nigeria, Ireland, Spain), which have addressed them through pastoral letters focusing on some specific local situations.

This has resulted in a direct involvement of Catholic organizations and institutions in different countries in assisting the victims, which includes listening to them, providing them with necessary assistance and support to escape from sexual violence, creating safe houses, promoting counselling geared towards re-integration into society or helping them to return in a sustainable way to their homelands and sponsoring prevention and awareness-raising activities.

In addition, in countries that have faced violent conflicts (DRC, Sierra Leone, Liberia), the Catholic Church has also reached out to former child soldiers, who are often exposed to the risk of being sold once they leave the militia. Activities are undertaken not only for their social and economic integration, but also for healing their wounds and sustaining the receiving family and/or community. This has become evident in quite a number of initiatives undertaken by religious congregations.

We have to admit that easy solutions do not exist. Addressing these particular human rights abuses requires a coherent and integral approach.

This should take into account not only the best interests of the victim, but also the just punishment of those who take advantage of it, and the introduction of preventive measures such as, on the one hand, awareness and consciousness raising and, on the other, addressing the root causes of the phenomenon, among which the macroeconomic situation certainly should not be overlooked.

Among other things, a coherent and integral approach should also promote the integration of the victims into the society that receives them, especially those who collaborate with the Authorities against the traffickers, which includes medical care and psycho-social counselling, accommodation, residence permits and access to employment.

It also means the return to the homeland, which may be accompanied by micro projects and/or loans, thus ensuring that victims do not return to the same harmful environment. In addition, measures could be introduced for the creation of compensation schemes. These could be financed by the confiscation of the profits and the assets gained by the traffickers through their criminal activities.

As Pope Benedict XVI stated in his recent Encyclical on hope: "The true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer. This holds true both for the individual and for society" ([Spe salvi](#), n. 38).

Thank you, Mr Chairman.