



PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM
DE IUSTITIA ET PACE

Conference on Combating Human Trafficking
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Introduction

Your Excellencies, distinguished speakers and participants, dear brothers and sisters, I warmly welcome you all.

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, happy to collaborate with the initiative of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, is particularly delighted to have you here today to discuss how to combat the problem of human trafficking. We are especially grateful for the numerous representatives of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People with its long history of effective work on this painful issue.

In spite of the engagement of the international community and the efforts of part of civil society, this very sad phenomenon continues to victimize millions. It is one of the worst forms of human exploitation; it is no less than a contemporary form of slavery.

As is well known, the international community's agreements in order to put an end to human trafficking are of long standing.

The first multilateral agreement dates as far back as 1904.¹ In the following years, many other international instruments were devised and are in force today. Among them I recall the two Protocols supplementing the *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*²: the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*³; and the *Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air*⁴.

With specific regard to migrant workers, we should also recall the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families*.⁵ Though agreed in 1990, the agreement has not been ratified by governments of many countries which host numerous migrant workers – including Group of 8 (G8), European Union and Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Thus migrant workers are still unprotected to a very significant extent.

¹ *International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic*, Paris, 18 May 1904; see also the *International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic*, Paris, 4 May 1910.

² *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, New York, 15 November 2000, in force from 29 September 2003.

³ *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, New York, 15 November 2000, in force from 25 December 2003.

⁴ *Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, New York, 15 November 2000, in force from 28 January 2004.

⁵ *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families*, New York, 18 December 1990, in force from 1 July 2003.

But there is more. Not only has the international community resolved to prohibit slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms. In addition, the rights of every person not to be enslaved or forced into servitude, nor to be required to perform forced or compulsory labour, have the status today of a peremptory norm of international law, a fundamental principle that allows no exception.

And yet, a very different reality persists alongside this initially reassuring international legal picture. As we all know, men, women and children live every day in conditions approximating slavery. They are bought and sold like commodities. Their inherent dignity is degraded by unscrupulous criminals who fill their pockets by this trafficking and exploitation.

We must ask ourselves: how is this possible?

The answer is that, while necessary, national laws and international agreements alone cannot overcome these evils afflicting humanity. The promotion of human rights is a task which requires the conversion of hearts, above all else.

We could say – paraphrasing what Pope Benedict XVI wrote about development – that the promotion of human rights *is impossible without upright men and women ... whose consciences are finely attuned to the requirements of the common good*⁶.

Thus, the efforts to effectively protect victims and prosecute traffickers, with a strong emphasis on prevention, need to be supplemented by a holistic approach. A major component must be educating the population in an authentic manner, especially the most vulnerable groups.

It will also be necessary to pay special attention to victims: not only to free them from exploitation, but also to accompany them on the path of rehabilitation and reintegration.

Extending this perspective, let us call on every person of good will to engage in creating a fairer international social order, so that poverty and underdevelopment cease to provide opportunities for traffickers to find their victims.

Thanks to her presence all over the world and her service to every human being, the Church is engaged in prevention and in the pastoral care of the victims of trafficking on multiple levels – from the universal to the local, from the institutional to practical action in the field.

Deeply convinced of the equal dignity of each one created by God in his image and likeness, the Church will not cease to make every effort to ensure that their inherent dignity is recognized and guaranteed in every circumstance. With the hope that there will be, in the words of St Paul, *neither slave nor free but all **one** in Christ (Gal 3:28)*.

In the face of this difficult task and hearing the cries of suffering humanity, we must above all not surrender to discouragement. We must remember that there is a great majority that opposes those who seek to enrich themselves by exploiting the lives of their fellows. It includes men and women, citizens and leaders, people of faith and those of good will, who devote their lives every day in differing organizations and roles to the fight against the scourge of human trafficking.

It is with this hope-filled outlook that we are gathered today to hear our presenters. It is my privilege to put you into their hands, and I thank you for your attention.

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson
President

⁶ BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 71.