



COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Church and Law Enforcement in Partnership

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Your Eminences, Excellencies, dear friends and colleagues, thank you for granting me this opportunity to speak at the formal dinner on the occasion of this important conference. It is an honour and privilege to do so in front of such distinguished guests and in such a wonderful setting, standing here in front of sculptures of the Muses of Music.

Well, I dare not sing – that would not be very entertaining for you. But I will share with you some reflections on our day's discussions and my own experiences of combating human trafficking over the last 15 years within the international police community.

My first impression of today is one of inspiration. I have been inspired by our working environment, by so many excellent speakers and by the programme, which the hosts and organisers have put together. They deserve our thanks for providing a rare and powerful example of uniting sections of a broad community to tackle human trafficking, bringing together the “ambassadors of hope”, as Ron Noble described it earlier today.

From a very personal perspective, listening to the speakers from the Church today reminded me of a forefather of mine, who was a Minister of the Protestant Faith some 150 years in a rural community of West Wales. He was locally famous for pursuing radical social reform and for the power of his sermons. Unfortunately for me I have not inherited most of his rhetorical skills. But fortunately for you, neither have I inherited his tendency to speak for a minimum of two hours!

I didn't follow in his footsteps into the Church. Instead I went into the police business, but as my fellow professionals here this evening would agree, this work is also about pursuing social reform in helping to make the world a safer place. In my line of work we are fighting many forms of serious international crime and terrorism, all of them dangerous threats to society. Some generate greater profits than human trafficking, such as cybercrime and drugs trafficking. Others are in the hands of well-established, more powerful crime syndicates, such as Italian mafia organisations.

But such categorisations are an insufficient means, on their own, to measure the true harm caused to society by certain crimes. Human trafficking illustrates the point. This is more than just about counting numbers of criminals and size of illicit profits. This is a trade in human misery. Victims are enslaved for long periods and even if rescued, suffer a lifetime of physical and psychological consequences. So combating it is about the fundamental issue of what values we wish to project in any well-respecting society, recognising human trafficking, therefore, for what it actually is – “a crime against humanity” as Pope Francis has said.

Maybe there is a problem with the terminology. I'm not sure I am comfortable with the terms, ‘human trafficking.’ It equates it with the more regularly known ‘drug trafficking’, as if drugs and people are the same type of illicit commodities to be shifted around the world. Let's call it what it actually is – modern slavery.

So this is a task about saving lives and protecting people. More than that it is about, as Cardinal Vincent said today, seeing human trafficking “through the eyes of the victim” and through “listening to the cry of the poor.” But that is not a conventional performance measurement yardstick for the police. Maybe that is why we have struggled to get human trafficking onto the first page of police priorities in recent years. Ten years ago I led some work from the UK to raise the profile of anti-trafficking work in the EU. With a few notable exceptions, such as in Italy and Ireland, we experienced a disappointing response.

It is better now with many police agencies around the world doing excellent work, as demonstrated today by the presentations of Tony Negus from Australia, Ranjit Sinha from India, Marius Roman from Romania, and Kevin Hyland from the UK. Across Europe the level of engagement has also improved, as exemplified by a doubling in the amount of intelligence relating to human trafficking being exchanged through Europol in the last two years. And we are putting that intelligence to good use – last week Europol helped authorities in Italy, the UK, Belgium and Romania to disrupt a major human trafficking organisation. But the number of concrete operational cases remains at a relatively low level and, in my opinion, police chiefs still have a responsibility to do more in this area.

Meanwhile it is getting harder for police to deal with this and other types of serious international crime. Global forces are changing the dynamics of crime everywhere, in particular those relating to technology, increased human mobility, and growing interconnections in the world economy. Globalisation has delivered many benefits to society but it also has a dark side, particularly on the Internet, responsible for producing dislocations in society and significant new shifts in criminal activity.

The case of human trafficking illustrates the point. The Internet is now a primary recruitment instrument for victims and, of course, a vending service for those forced to work in the sex industry. Meanwhile the expansion in global transportation networks, the rise of the low-cost airlines, and the freedom of movement between the majority of EU member states for example, have all provided new opportunities for those responsible for the trade in human trafficking. In terms of the global economy too, the widening gap in income disparities has increased the pool of potential victims, while the conditions of the financial crisis in the last five years has increased the demand for illegal labour. So these are all examples of globalisation with a dark side, with hugely significant consequences for the police.

At this conference we have considered the response that governments and communities should take to modern slavery. We have heard many impressive accounts – from the police in terms of raising performance levels and investigative resources and the need to work better as an international police community, for example through INTERPOL and Europol. We also heard about the establishment of a new group of police chiefs to tackle this trade – the Santa Marta Group under the chairmanship of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe.

We also agreed that legislators and our political leaders must play an important part – Theresa May told us about the excellent initiative towards a new Bill of Parliament on Modern Slavery in the UK. And, of course, we heard about the role of the Church – of all faiths – and other parts of civic society.

In hearing these different accounts we also came to the conclusion that the real power of this action comes from combining all efforts in an integrated way – by “being collaborative” as Bishop Pat Lynch remarked.

This is the essential point of this conference. If we put our minds to it – and our hearts and faiths, for that matter – of course we can succeed in banishing modern slavery. After all, our ancestors did. They eliminated most original forms of slavery and, in doing so, had to overcome society’s own forces of globalisation in those days, in terms of industrialisation, new technology and the increased movement of people. They succeeded – so can we.

So we should remember that as the most important message of the day. That if we work together and leverage the power of the fundamental human condition – to do good over bad, right over wrong – to “be aware of our dignity” as Bishop Marcelo Sorondo, then of course we can eradicate modern slavery.

Thank you very much.