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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Interventions by the Head of the Holy See Delegation at the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly during the plenary session of the High Level Meeting on human trafficking

Intervention by H.E. Msgr. Paul R. Gallagher on the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons

Intervention by H.E. Msgr. Paul R. Gallagher on the protection of and assistance to victims

The Plenary Session of the high level meeting on the evaluation of the progress of the United Nations Plan of Global Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons is currently underway in New York at the United Nations, from 27 to 28 September 2017, as part of the 72nd Session of the General Assembly. The following are the interventions the Head of the Holy See Delegation, H.E. Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, secretary for Relations with States, pronounced yesterday in New York regarding the evaluation of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons and the protection of and assistance for victims:

Intervention by H.E. Msgr. Paul R. Gallagher on the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons (27 September)

Mr. President,

Since the adoption, in 2010, of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons in 2010, the extent of the crime of human trafficking across the globe has worsened. Thankfully, however, during the same period, the recognition of the dimensions of the problem, the resources required to respond to it, and the resolve of governments, institutions and individuals to combat it have grown. It is, alas, a meagre consolation, because the gap is still growing between our commitments and efforts and the reality confronting victims including the serious dangers that persons in vulnerable situations face every day. Finding effective measures to close this gap is the reason we are gathered here.

One of the most conspicuous and promising signs of the growing resolve to fight trafficking in persons is that three of the 169 targets in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are explicitly dedicated to fighting different dimensions of this modern “crime against humanity.”[1] However, as Pope Francis noted minutes before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, in his address to the General Assembly: “Solemn commitments,” although necessary, “are not enough.” Our commitments to fight this heinous crime must translate into action and puts an end, as quickly as possible, to plagues like “human trafficking, the marketing of human organs and tissues, the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, slave labour, including prostitution,” and other evils. We must ensure, Pope Francis underlined, that our efforts are “truly effective in the struggle against all of these scourges.”[2] The current appraisal of the Global Plan of Action provides us an opportunity to assess that effectiveness.

My Delegation would like to structure its assessment on the progress of the Plan of Action around the four objectives that underpin it, 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.

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. On the part of each country, the utmost honesty is essential in examining what domestic factors of demand fuel this growing global industry. With regard to cultural factors, the Political Declaration commits the international community to intensify efforts to “prevent and address, with a view to eliminating, the demand that fosters trafficking, especially of women and girls, for all forms of exploitation.”[3] To do so in a resolute way requires a frank and courageous examination of those practices, such as pornography and prostitution, that foster sexually addictive behaviour and the dehumanization of other persons as mere objects of gratification.

Concerning the protection and assistance of victims, my Delegation believes that there is now greater awareness and legal recognition that the victims of trafficking 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. Because of the deep traumas suffered, however, there is need for greater recognition that the work of rehabilitation cannot be a brief program but requires a long-term investment to provide the healing and training necessary for the victims to begin a normal, productive and autonomous life.

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. At the same time, however, as the 2016 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons makes clear, there are still very few convictions and too much impunity.[4]

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. The Political Declaration specifically mentions partnerships with and among faith-based organizations.[5] Just to mention an example, the Santa Marta Group, named after the residence of Pope Francis, is an international alliance of police chiefs and bishops working together, at all levels, to promote coordination between law enforcement and faith-based organizations in combating human trafficking according to the specific competencies of each one. Similarly, the many groups and networks of Catholic religious sisters, coordinated internationally by Talitha Kum, a network of 22 member organizations in 70 countries, show how faith-groups can collaborate with law enforcement authorities and with one another, joining more powerful coalitions with multi-pronged strategies in the fight against trafficking in persons and other contemporary forms of modern slavery.

In his 2015 Message for the World Day of Prayer for Peace, dedicated to the theme of eliminating human trafficking, Pope Francis emphasized this need for partnerships and for a new worldwide solidarity and fraternity to remedy the indifference and exploitation that forms a polluted human ecology, in which human trafficking thrives. “We are facing a global phenomenon that exceeds the competence of any one community or country,” he wrote. “In order to eliminate it, we need a mobilization comparable in size to that of the phenomenon itself.”[6] The Global Plan of Action is an important part of that mobilization and this appraisal a means to help make the Global Plan increasingly effective. Our efforts must be commensurate to the challenge.

Thank you, Mr. President.

[1] Address of Pope Francis to participants in the international conference on combating human trafficking, 10 April 2014.[2] Meeting with the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, 25 September 2015.[3] Political Declaration on the Implementation of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, paragraph 9.

[4] 2016 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, p. 16.

[5] Political Declaration on the Implementation of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, paragraph 24.

[6] *No Longer Slaves, But Brothers and Sisters*, Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2015

Intervention by H.E. Msgr. Paul R. Gallagher on the protection of and assistance to victims (27 September)

Interactive Panel Discussion 2

“The Global Plan of Action and effective partnerships

for the protection of and assistance to victims, including through the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, also taking into consideration the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals”

Mr. Moderator,

In the Political Declaration on the Implementation of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons adopted at the start of this High-Level Meeting, the international community expresses its “solidarity with and compassion for victims and survivors,” calls for “full respect of their human rights,” and commits itself to providing “appropriate care, assistance and services for their recovery and rehabilitation, working with civil society and other relevant partners.” [1] Among such partnerships, it specifically mentions those with and among faith-based organizations.[2]

In line with this, the Holy See would like to highlight, at least, some of the recent partnerships that the Catholic Church and Catholic organizations have sought to form in order to protect and assist victims of human trafficking and help combat the larger context of this dark and revolting global scourge.

An essential collaboration is that among the leaders and faithful of different religions in various parts of the world. In December 2014, the Vatican hosted a meeting of religious leaders that led to a Universal Declaration of Faith Leaders Against Slavery, in which all pledged to “do all in our power, within our faith communities and beyond, to work together for the freedom of all those who are enslaved and trafficked so that their future may be restored.”[3] At that meeting, Pope Francis thanked his fellow religious leaders “for their commitment in favor of the survivors of human trafficking” and expressed the conviction that “sustained by the ideals of our confessions of faith and by our shared values, we all can and must raise the standard of spiritual values, common effort and the vision of freedom to eradicate slavery from our planet.” He also shared his hope that the example of joint

interreligious commitment would summon “all people of faith, leaders, governments, businesses, all men and women of good will, to give their strong support and join in the action against modern slavery in all its forms.” [4]

Another important form of partnership is among Catholic institutions and organizations. The fight against trafficking in persons remains a very high pastoral priority of Pope Francis, as it was for his predecessors, and Catholic institutions and organizations are in alignment with this fight. I wish to underline in particular the role of women religious, who are on the front line in helping those caught in the snare of human trafficking, especially women and girls, to escape from situations of slavery. With loving concern, they patiently accompany the victims on the long road back to a life lived again in freedom. These women religious work in very difficult situations, mostly dominated by violence. They form networks at multiple levels to coordinate their efforts and share best practices and resources, thus maximizing their impact. The *Talitha Kum* network brings together 22 associations across 70 countries in 5 continents. It helps victims “to rise” to a life of restored dignity, recalling the Aramaic words of Jesus to a young girl who was lifeless: “Young girl, I say to you, arise” (Mark 5:41). While members of the South Asian movement of religious against trafficking now comprise about 200 nuns from 63 congregations working in various countries[5], the RENATE association coordinates the efforts of women religious in 27 countries of Europe.

The third form of collaboration we would like to mention is the alliance between the Church and the law enforcement authorities called “The Santa Marta Group”, after the residence of Pope Francis in which it was founded. The reality is that many trafficking survivors struggle to trust law enforcement, making their liberation and the prosecution of their traffickers much more difficult. Experience has shown that it is much easier for them to grow to trust religious sisters, and other Church personnel, who can build up their trust in the legal process and provide them safe haven and other forms of assistance.

Mr. Moderator,

The Political Declaration emphasizes “in the strongest terms possible the importance of strengthening collective action ...to end trafficking in persons.”[6] The global nature of the trafficking problem and the vile forms of collusion that are involved in perpetrating this crime against people in the most vulnerable situations, require a commensurate response of collaboration, fraternity and solidarity. This is what those enslaved by traffickers urgently and desperately need and what this Panel, this High-Level Meeting, the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, and the 2030 Agenda are all hoping to foster.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

[1] Political Declaration on the Implementation of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, paragraph 8.

[2] Ibidem, paragraph 24.

[3] Faith Leaders’ Universal Declaration Against Slavery (2014). See <http://www.declarationproject.org>

[4] Pope Francis, At the Ceremony for the Signing of the Faith Leaders’ Universal Declaration against Slavery, 2 December 2014.

[5] <http://globalsistersreport.org/news/trafficking/south-asian-congregations-join-crusade-against-human-trafficking-49061>

[6] Political Declaration on the Implementation of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, paragraph 24.
