



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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Audience with Members of the Santa Marta Group

At midday today, in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the “Santa Marta Group”, at the end of the meeting that took place in the Vatican from 8 to 9 February.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Brother Bishops,

Dear Friends,

I am happy to greet you, the members of the Santa Marta Group, at the conclusion of your Conference, which is devoted this year to providing a worldwide perspective on human trafficking and modern slavery. As leaders in law enforcement, research and public policy, and pastoral assistance, you offer an essential contribution to addressing the causes and effects of this modern-day scourge, which continues to cause untold human suffering.

It is my hope that these days of reflection and shared experiences have brought into clearer light the interplay between the global and local aspects of human trafficking. Experience shows that such modern forms of slavery are far more widespread than previously imagined, even – to our scandal and shame – within the most prosperous of our societies.

God’s cry to Cain, found in the first pages of the Bible – “Where is your brother?” – challenges us to examine seriously the various forms of complicity by which society tolerates, and encourages, particularly with regard to the sex trade, the exploitation of vulnerable men, women and children (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 211). Initiatives to

combat human trafficking, while concretely aimed at dismantling criminal structures, must increasingly consider broader issues associated, for example, with the responsible use of technology and the communications media, to say nothing of exploring the ethical implications of models of economic growth that privilege profit over persons.

I trust that your discussions in these days will also help to raise awareness of the growing need to support victims of these crimes by accompanying them on a path of reintegration into society and the recovery of their human dignity. The Church is grateful for every effort made to bring the balm of God's mercy to the suffering, for this also represents an essential step in the healing and renewal of society as a whole.

Dear friends, with gratitude for your commitment and cooperation in this vital area, I offer my prayerful best wishes for your continued work. Upon you and your families, and upon all those whom you serve, I invoke the Lord's blessings of wisdom, strength and peace. And I ask you, please, to pray for me.
