



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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To the Santa Marta Group: victims of human trafficking increase in number year by year

This morning in the Consistory Hall Pope Francis received around a hundred members of the “Santa Marta Group”, on the occasion of the third Conference of this international organisation against human trafficking. Launched in 2014 by Pope Francis and chaired by Cardinal Vincent Nichols, archbishop of Westminster, the Santa Marta Group is composed of police chiefs, bishops, religious sisters and representatives from civil society, and aims to forge relationships of trust between police and the Church, especially religious sisters, enabling this crime to be defeated and the victims to be accompanied, assisted, and ultimately reintegrated into society.

Since 2014 the Santa Marta Group has held conferences in England and Spain, and along with the Holy See permanent observer jointly organised a conference at the United Nations. It has also held regional meetings in Latin America, Africa and Asia, as well as a conference in Ireland to focus on the maritime industry.

The Holy Father cordially greeted the members of the Group and emphasised that human trafficking represents one of the greatest challenges of our time. “The Santa Marta Group, which brings together ecclesiastical and civil authorities, is making an important contribution to combating the social scourge of human trafficking, linked to new forms of slavery, whose victims are men and women, often minors, exploited on account of their poverty and marginalisation. As I wrote to you a year ago on the occasion of your meeting at El Escorial, what is needed is a concerted, active and consistent effort both to eliminate the causes of this complex phenomenon, and to encounter, assist and accompany those who fall into the snares of trafficking. Unfortunately, the number of these victims, according to international organisations, is growing year by year. They are the most defenceless, who are robbed of their dignity, their physical and psychological integrity, and even their life”.

“Dear friends, I thank you and I encourage you to continue in your efforts. The Lord will know how to compensate for what is done to the least in today’s society. He said, ‘I was hungry, I was thirsty’, and you helped me; today He could also say, ‘I was abused, exploited, enslaved’, and you came to my aid”.

“I continue to accompany you with my closeness and my prayer. And you too, please, pray for me”, Francis concluded.

