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To the participants in the International Conference on Human Trafficking: a wound on the body of contemporary humanity

At midday today, in the Vatican's New Synod Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the International Conference on Human Trafficking, organized by the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (8-11 April, *Fraterna Domus*, Sacrofano) on the occasion of the concluding session.

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am pleased to meet you at the end of your conference dedicated to the implementation of the *Pastoral Guidelines on Human Trafficking*, published by the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, and approved by me. I thank Fr. Michael Czerny for the words he addressed to me on behalf of all the participants.

"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (*Jn* 10: 10). This phrase of the Gospel of John summarizes Jesus' mission: to offer life in fullness to all men and women of every age, according to the plan of the Father. The Son of God made Himself man to show to all human beings the way of fulfilment of their humanity, in conformity with the uniqueness and unrepeatability of each one.

Unfortunately the world at present is sadly marked by situations that hinder the fulfilment of this mission. As highlighted in the *Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking*, "our times have witnessed a growth of individualism and egocentricity, attitudes that tend to regard others through a lens of cool utility, valuing them according to criteria of convenience and personal benefit" (17).

It is essentially that tendency to commodify the other, which I have repeatedly denounced[1]. Human trafficking is among the most dramatic manifestations of this commodification. In its many forms, it constitutes a wound "on

the body of contemporary humanity” [2], a profound scourge in the humanity of those who suffer it and those who implement it. Indeed, trafficking disfigures the humanity of the victim, offending his freedom and dignity. But, at the same time, it dehumanizes those who perform it, denying them access to “life in abundance”. Finally, trafficking seriously damages humanity as a whole, tearing apart the human family and the Body of Christ.

Trafficking – we were saying – constitutes an unjustifiable violation of the freedom and dignity of the victims, constitutive dimensions of the human being wanted and created by God. It is therefore to be considered a crime against humanity[3]. The same gravity, by analogy, must be attributed to all forms of contempt for the freedom and dignity of any human being, compatriots or foreigners.

Those who are guilty of this crime damage not only others, but also themselves. Indeed, each one of us is created to love and take care of the other, and this reaches its apex in the gift of self: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (*Jn 15: 13*). In the relationship we establish with others we put our humanity in play, approaching or distancing ourselves from the model of the human being as wanted by God the Father and revealed in the Son incarnate. Therefore, every choice contrary to the realization of God’s plan for us is a betrayal of our humanity and a renouncement of the “life in abundance” offered by Jesus Christ.

All the actions that aim to restore and promote our humanity and that of others are in line with the mission of the Church, as a continuation of Jesus Christ’s salvific mission. And this missionary value is evident in the struggle against all forms of trafficking and in commitment towards the redemption of the survivors; a struggle and a commitment that also have beneficial effects on our own humanity, opening the way to the fullness of life, the ultimate aim of our existence.

Your presence, dear brothers and sisters, is a tangible sign of the commitment that many local Churches have generously assumed in this pastoral field. The numerous initiatives that place you in the front line in preventing trafficking, protecting survivors and prosecuting perpetrators are worthy of admiration. I feel I must express special thanks to the many religious congregations who have worked – and continue to work, also as network – as the “avant-garde” of the missionary action of the Church against every form of trafficking.

Much has been done and is being done, but there remains much yet to do. Faced with a phenomenon as complex and obscure as human trafficking, it is essential to ensure the coordination of various pastoral initiatives, both at local and international level. The offices provided by the local Churches, religious congregations and Catholic organizations are called to share experiences and knowledge, and to unite forces in a synergistic action involving the countries of origin, transit and destination, and the people who are objects of trafficking.

To make its action more suitable and effective, the Church must know how to benefit from the help of other political and social actors. The stipulation of structured collaboration with institutions and other organizations of civil society will be a guarantee of more incisive and lasting results.

I thank you from the heart for what you are doing to help so many of our brothers and sisters, innocent victims of the commodification of the human person. I encourage you to continue in this mission, often risky and anonymous, but precisely for this reason irrefutable proof of your gratuitous giving.

Through the intercession of Saint Josephine Bakhita, reduced to slavery as a child, bought and sold, but who was then freed and flourished in fullness as a daughter of God, I invoke abundant blessings upon all of you and those who are engaged in the struggle against trafficking. I assure you of my remembrance in prayer. And you, please, do not forget to pray for me!

[1] Cf *Address to participants in the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Culture*, 7 February 2015; *General Audience*, 22 April 2015; Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, 54; *Address to members of the Parliamentary Anti-Mafia Commission*, 21 September 2017.

[2] *Address to participants in the International Conference on Human Trafficking*, 10 April 2014.

[3] Cf *Address to a group of new Ambassadors on the occasion of the presentation of their Credential Letters*, 12 December 2013; *Address to the Delegation of the International Association of Penal Law*, 23 October 2014; *Message to participants in the Conference on Human Trafficking organized by the "Santa Marta Group"*, 30-31 October 2015; *Address to participants in the meeting on Human Trafficking promoted by "RENATE"*, 7 November 2016; *Word to participants in the IV World Prayer Day against Human Trafficking*, 12 February 2018; *Pre-Synodal Meeting with young people*, 19 March 2018; *Video Message to participants in the Second International Forum on Modern Slavery*, 5-8 May 2018; *Address to participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences*, 12 November 2018; *Greeting to members of the Galileo Foundation*, 8 February 2019.
