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Intervention of the Secretary for Relations with States at the Symposium in the Vatican on the theme: "Pathways to Achieving Human Dignity: Partnering with Faith-Based Organizations"

The following is the intervention by the Secretary for Relations with States, Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, at the opening this morning of the Symposium taking place in the Vatican's Old Synod Hall on the theme: "Pathways to Achieving Human Dignity: Partnering with Faith-Based Organizations":

Intervention of Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher

Mr. Secretary of State, the Honorable Mike Pompeo,

Excellences, distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome each of you to this Symposium which is co-sponsored by the Section for Relations with States of the Secretariat of State and the United States Embassy to the Holy See, as one of a number of key events organized to celebrate the 35th Anniversary of the Diplomatic Relations between the Holy See and the United States of America.

As Pope Francis emphasized on the occasion of his Apostolic Visit to the United States in September 2015, the aim of our collaboration is to build a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive and to safeguard the dignity and the inalienable rights of every human person.

Today's Symposium will focus on three important questions connected to our shared commitment to the promotion of human dignity, namely, the advancement of the fundamental right to religious freedom, combatting the scourge of human trafficking and providing humanitarian assistance.

1. Advancing religious freedom: As Pope Francis stated in Rabat “freedom of conscience and religious freedom are inseparably linked to human dignity”.

Religious freedom is simultaneously a fundamental principle that flows from human nature and an existential reality in the life of every person. Unfortunately, both as a principle and in lived experience of too many people, it is under threat. "In today's world," Pope Francis has observed with some sadness, "religious freedom is more often affirmed than put into practice." [1]

In Abu Dhabi, on February 4 this year, Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, made a joint declaration on "Human Fraternity".

In that declaration, among many other interesting points, they "resolutely declare that religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings".

The joint declaration also put a particular emphasis on the indispensable need to develop and respect the principle of equal citizenship for all. No one should feel or be treated as a second class citizen because of religious affiliation.

In the effort to advance religious freedom, it would be beneficial for political authorities to engage with religious leaders, with faith-based organizations and with civil society organizations, truly committed to promoting religious freedom and freedom of conscience. While not failing to denounce the violations of religious freedom, it would be valuable also to develop an international network of religious leaders and people of good will to build tolerance, fraternity and healthy pluralism. Religions have the right and the duty to make clear that it is possible to build a society where "a healthy pluralism which respects differences and values them as such" is a "precious ally in the commitment to defending human dignity... and a path to peace in our world". [2]

It is increasingly evident that religious freedom (and religion itself) is of benefit to peoples in many areas of life. In light of this, Pope Francis has noted that: “when individuals and communities are guaranteed the effective exercise of their rights, they are not only free to realize their potential, they are also, through their talents and their hard work, free to contribute to the welfare and enrichment of society as a whole.” [3] Indeed, I am of the opinion that the principal emphasis with regard to religious freedom should not be political or ideological: the main concern should be to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms effectively, and to promote peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies, in which people can express their beliefs freely without fear of being censored by the common discourse and where minorities are fully respected.

2. Combatting Human trafficking: Human trafficking is one of the darkest and most reprehensible realities in the world today. When Pope Francis went to the United Nations in September 2015, he said that plagues like "human trafficking, the marketing of human organs and tissues, the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, slave labor, including prostitution," and other evils cannot be met by "solemn commitments" alone. We have to ensure that our efforts are "truly effective in the struggle against all of these scourges."

Persons who have "nothing to lose" are very vulnerable to the rapacity of traffickers, who are masters at spotting and exploiting situations of despair. Human traffickers have no scruple about exploiting very vulnerable people who may be escaping persecution, conflict, environmental disasters, and economic privation. Armed conflicts and the crisis of migrants and refugees have exacerbated the number of vulnerable persons who become prey to traffickers.

The Holy See and the Catholic Church are deeply committed to the liberation, rehabilitation, and reintegration of the victims of trafficking. To mention just an example, Catholic religious sisters across the globe are working tirelessly to restore the dignity of those trafficked, and many of them have come together in the *Talitha Kum* Network, which is also represented at this Symposium. We need courageous people like these to change the lives of the vulnerable; we need dedicated people to raise awareness about the evil modus operandi of traffickers, we need brave leaders to take appropriate decisions to fight and gradually defeat this horrible crime

against humanity.

3. Providing humanitarian assistance: the Holy See and the Catholic Church, through its network of charitable agencies, provide humanitarian assistance of direct benefit to millions of people around the world, especially in areas of armed conflicts or other political, social or economic crises. In distributing aid, Catholic agencies and entities make no distinction regarding the religious or ethnic identity of those requiring assistance, and seek always to give priority to the most vulnerable and to those most in need.

Catholic agencies receive their funds from appeals promoted by national episcopal conferences, private donations of Catholic faithful, and sometimes through their partnerships with governments and international organizations. The Holy See appreciates such collaboration. However, in some cases government funding is conditioned by ideological considerations, not always compatible with religious principles and convictions. It would be invasive for a donor to impose his culture, his values, his ideology and policies, eroding the traditions, history, religious and moral values of people he intends to help.

I also wish to emphasize that while responding to humanitarian emergencies, the Holy See believes that it is urgent to address the root causes of such crises, such as horrific wars, persecutions, human rights violations, political or social instability, extreme poverty, consequences of climate change, and so on. In this regard, it is important to remember the call of Pope Francis, in "*Laudato si'*", for an «integral ecology» that underscores the link between the protection of the environment, the fight against poverty, social justice, economy and politics.

All these questions will be discussed with our guests and panelists: I once again welcome each of you and warmly thank you for attending this Symposium.

Allow me to thank in a very special way Secretary Pompeo for traveling to the Vatican for this event. This is a clear sign of the importance he attaches to the relationship between the Holy See and the United States of America, as well as the particular focus of the US Government on Religious Freedom and partnership with faith-based organizations. Thank you very much. I also wish to commend Her Excellency, Ambassador Callista Gingrich, and the staff of the US Embassy to the Holy See for the initiative and logistical organization of this event, in collaboration with the Section for Relations with States, the Protocol Office and the Governorate of the Vatican City State, which has kindly offered and prepared this Old Synod Hall for today's Symposium. Thank you all.

On behalf of Pope Francis, of the Cardinal Secretary of State and on my own behalf, I am pleased to open officially the Symposium.

Thank you!

[1]http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/june/documents/papa-francesco_20140620_liberta-religiosa.html

[2] Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 255 and 257

[3]http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150926_usa-liberta-religiosa.html
