



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the 18th Session of the Human Rights Council – Item 3: Contemporary Slavery
Geneva, 7 March 2013

Mr. President,

Far from abating, the scourge of human trafficking is growing and it becomes more diversified with the increase of human mobility and with the globalization of communication and trade. The focus on the sale, prostitution of children and child pornography by the latest Report of the Special Rapporteur underlines a *global* trend of human trafficking. The latest Report by the U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime on Human Trafficking (2012) paints a grim picture of the millions of people trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced labor: they come from at least 136 different nationalities and have been found in 118 countries. Although the majority of such persons are women (55-60 %), the flow of children is growing alarmingly quickly from 20% between 2003-2006 to 27% between 2007-2010. Among the total of trafficking cases identified globally, trafficking for sexual exploitation accounts for 58%.

The Report of the Special Rapporteur shows with accuracy how children can become victims of the sexual fantasies of adults. The phenomenon is certainly not new, but recently it has been unleashed by the liberalisation of sexual behaviour. Past and current studies have made it clear that the goal of traffickers is mainly economic. They seek to maximise their profit-making activities by using human beings as “commodities”. The international community is confronted with a criminal market that generates billions of dollars for the traffickers. When the risks of engaging in such activity are low, high profits become tempting. The Special Rapporteur’s Report shows that, in the case of trafficking children, risks are low in many ways and in many parts of the world. There is a clear need to update legislation, increase international and regional cooperation, share information and good practices, combat impunity and corruption, enhance judicial practices, care for the victims and provide ways to reintegrate them into a normal and dignified life in society.

Mr. President,

As in every market, the offer serves a demand. Child trafficking exists because there is a demand. To disrupt the market, we need to confront and fight the “consumers” who are willing to pay for the “services” of children. Such activities could be effectively

prevented by enacting and implementing legislation that criminalizes the consumption of child pornography or the sexual abuse of a child.

Legal measures, however, are not enough. As the Report of the Special Rapporteur points out, prevention also should address the consumerist culture that stimulates and promotes the unhealthy and immature sexual desires that drive “consumers” to this market. Legitimate questions should be posed about why many tourists seek such “services” that cause such irreversible harm to children. Prevention should dare to ask what has happened to the tourist seeking that kind of “service”. How is the consumer market for sexual exploitation created in the first place? If the understanding of individual freedom rejects the ethical boundaries imposed by nature itself, the trafficking of persons and the violation of their innate dignity will continue to occur, and the action of the State will be ineffective.

The persistent economic crisis, current wars and civil conflicts, the high prices of food, famine, abject poverty and migration, political upheavals, failed States, these are as many opportunities for human traffickers to prey upon vulnerable victims. The predator practice of trafficker’s feeds on the weakest, people already in need and therefore easy to kidnap, enslave and reduce to “commodities”. A concrete example of human trafficking is the ring operating in the Horn of Africa and the Sinai region: it offers a “real-life” sample of the cycle of abuse that is unleashed by trafficking of human persons. To prevent this scourge, we must reinforce human security and address the root causes that make people vulnerable. To combat this trade is to discourage criminal groups from seeking out and exploit innocent victims.

Mr. President,

Among the shocking practices of human trafficking, the case of children requires special and urgent attention and action on both humanitarian and moral grounds. Identifying survivors, providing them support, preparing them for a productive life free of traumas and developing an effective prosecution of traffickers are the joint tasks of the private and public sectors of society. Victims, however, will find real protection if the prevention task is taken seriously by changing a culture that justifies their exploitation and tolerates with impunity the violation of human security, a breeding ground of human vulnerability.

Pope John Paul II, in a Letter on the occasion of the International Conference on “21st Century Slavery - the Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings,” stated that human trafficking “constitutes a shocking offense against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. In particular, the sexual exploitation of women and children is an especially repugnant aspect of this trade, and must be recognized as an intrinsic violation of human dignity and human rights.”¹

¹ Pope John Paul II, Letter to Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran on the Occasion of the International Conference on 21st Century Slavery—the Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings, May 15, 2002.