



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 24th Session of the Human Rights Council –
Item 3: Contemporary Forms of Slavery
Geneva, 12 September 2013

Mr. President,

Modern day slave trade is a fast-growing industry in our globalized world and it affects some 30 million persons. This criminal 21 billion-dollar-a-year industry is entrenched in almost all the supply chains providing food, clothes, and electronics, to the world market. The products of our daily usage should remind us of the responsibility to be aware of how workers, who make our life more comfortable, are dealt with.

The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery outlines effectively the challenges facing the international community and the initiatives needed to combat this practice which reduces human beings to mere tools for profit and poisons human society.

Today's slaves are children forced to work in hazardous and unhealthy conditions; they are women exploited in domestic work where the requirements of justice and of the 2011 Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189) – concerning decent work for domestic workers that entered into force a few days ago – are negated; they are women manipulated into sexual activity for tourists and other taskmasters; they are boys and men obliged to carry out dirty and dangerous jobs without any choice or rightful claims on their part. Many of these slaves remain imprisoned in their condition as a result of trafficking in persons on the part of criminal individuals and groups: all are victims whose plight is by now well-documented, but not sufficiently addressed, as is the case of the migrants who disappear in the Sinai desert in their desperate journey towards freedom.

A culture of greed and total disregard of human dignity is at the root of the slavery phenomenon. First of all, it is a perversion of all ethical standards, “an affront [to human dignity and] to fundamental values which are shared by all cultures and peoples, values rooted in the very nature of the human person¹”. Moreover, this culture detaches freedom from the moral law with the consequence that the victims of contemporary slavery become a mere commodity in the market of consumerism.

As the Special Rapporteur points out, progress has been made in combating slavery through juridical instruments, good practices and increased awareness of the

¹ Pope John Paul II. Letter to Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran on the Occasion of the International Conference: “*Twenty-First Century Slavery: The Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings.*” Rome, 15 May 2002.

many forms that this crime takes from debt bondage to servile marriage and from child slavery to domestic servitude².

Mr. President,

The Holy See is deeply concerned about the persistence of this social plague and, particularly through the activity of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, is committed to combating it in its various manifestations. Additionally, Christian faith-based groups have been on the forefront of this effort to reach out to victims of slavery and to provide them with an escape and a return to normal life by making available temporary shelter, counselling and legal advice. Thus, for example, in response to a strong appeal by Pope Francis, who stigmatized “selfishness that continues in human trafficking, the most extensive form of slavery in this twenty-first century³,” the Pontifical Academies of Sciences and Social Sciences, together with the World Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, are organizing a preparatory workshop to examine human trafficking and modern slavery.

To counteract the persistence of slavery some practical steps are called for: an updated national legislation, a public culture that values and uphold the transcendent dignity of every person, an effective judicial system that prevents slave masters from retaking control of their victims. Human security needs reinforcing and the root causes that make people vulnerable must be thoroughly addressed by promoting development, creating decent jobs, and facilitating access to education and health care. The Special Rapporteur reviews a series of good practices that would remedy this wound on the human family constituted by the various forms of modern slavery. As always, the challenge remains the implementation of human rights treaties and recommendations so that the collaboration of Governments, the international community, the business sector and civil society may effectively advance the elimination of an evil that offends the dignity of every person.

² Several treaties have been enacted: The 1926 Slavery Convention or the Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery; the ILO 1930 Convention Concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour or Forced Labour Convention (No.29); The United Nations 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery; the 1957 ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention; the U.N. Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. The UN Slavery Trust Fund on *Contemporary Forms of Slavery* was established in 1991 by the General Assembly.

³ Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi Message, Easter Sunday*, 31 March 2013.