



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 27th Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 3: Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery
Geneva, 9 September 2014

Mr. President,

My Delegation thanks the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, for her timely Report, both on the activities undertaken during the mandate of her predecessor, and on her own priorities during the period of 2014 to 2017.

Some shocking forms of contemporary slavery justifiably have attracted the attention of the media and the international community-at-large; these include massive kidnappings and sale of young girls under the false premises of religious teachings as is done, for example, by Boko Haram in Nigeria or by the so-called Islamic State group in northern Iraq. Some 250,000 children are forcibly conscripted and even used as “human shields” in the frontlines of armed conflicts. Without any intention to ignore or diminish concern for such shameful abuses of human dignity, Mr. President, the Holy See takes note of the Special Rapporteur’s stated intention to address the subtler forms of slavery that deserve specific attention, including the 5.7 million children who are victims of forced and bonded labour, domestic servitude, early, forced and servile marriage, child slave work and caste-based forms of slavery, which affect the lives of so many and are not confined to developing and poor countries.

While acknowledging the profit motive that selfishly motivates the demand for forced labour and other contemporary forms of slavery, the Special Rapporteur indicates additional important “push” factors, including the increasing incidence of absolute poverty among many families affected by the economic crises, the lack of education and illiteracy, long-term and apparently irreversible unemployment which force people into the informal-sector work without adequate pay or social protection, involuntary migration, and human trafficking.

The international community already has developed, and tries to implement, numerous international conventions and accords to protect against contemporary forms of slavery. My Delegation believes, however, that such instruments will not fully meet their aims if we do not simultaneously inspire broader political will and engage all members of society. We need to break the silence about this “...open wound on the body of contemporary society...” and motivate “...men and women of good will who want to

cry out, 'Enough!' "¹ Pope Francis takes each and every opportunity to denounce the "...many abominable forms of slavery [that] persist in today's world..."² Thus he has joined with leaders from other major religious traditions to promote the ideals of faith and of shared human values in order to eradicate modern slavery and human trafficking from our world and for all time.³ Moreover, the Holy Father has announced that the theme, "Slaves no more, but brothers and sisters", will be the title of the Message for the upcoming 48th World Day of Peace.

Mr. President, to counter slavery effectively, the inviolable dignity of every person must be recognized above all: we are all equal members of the one human family and, therefore, we must reject any inequality, which would allow one person to enslave another. We are called to act everywhere with mutual love and generosity, thus leading to liberation and inclusion for everyone.⁴

¹ Address of Pope Francis to Participants in the International Conference to Combat Human Trafficking," Vatican City, 10 April 2014, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/april/documents/papa-francesco_20140410_tratta-persone-umane.html

² Announcement of Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: "Slavery to be the theme of 2015 World Day of Peace," <http://www.news.va/en/news/slavery-to-be-theme-of-2015-world-day-of-peace>

³ Press Statement of "Global Freedom Network," Vatican City, 17 March 2014, <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2014/03/17/0182/00396.html>

⁴ Announcement of Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: "Slavery to be the theme of 2015 World Day of Peace," <http://www.news.va/en/news/slavery-to-be-theme-of-2015-world-day-of-peace>