



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to
the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 36th Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 3 – Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and
consequences

Geneva, 12 September 2017

Mr. President,

My Delegation appreciates the Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences. Supporting the *ius cogens status* of the prohibition of slavery, the Holy See firmly condemns these new forms of slavery as “extremely serious crimes, (and) an open wound on the body of contemporary society”¹.

Today, at the 72nd General Assembly in New York, Alliance 8.7 is launching the Global Estimate of Modern Slavery and Child Labour, produced by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Walk Free Foundation (WFF), that will provide global and regional figures which will help measure the progress of global efforts to achieve SDG Target 8.7. With this target, world leaders indeed committed themselves in taking “immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour”². Unfortunately, far from a concrete realization of the target, we are witnessing nowadays a scandalous phenomenon worldwide as slavery and related practices continue to occur on an unprecedented scale affecting millions of men, women and children.

Trafficking in persons for labour and sexual exploitation in the private economy generates an estimated US\$ 150 billion in illegal profits per year³, now exceeding those of the drug trade. This kind of illegal economy is growing, not decreasing. Among the millions of migrants globally, many are at risk of being trafficked and exploited: often impoverished and jobless, they are easy targets for those who abuse them in situations of contemporary slavery. As the Special Rapporteur pointed out, “the irregular employment or migration status of some migrant workers make them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and creates barriers to them seeking legal redress”⁴. In addition, humanitarian crises that are spreading nowadays, such as

¹ Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 18 April 2015.

² Sustainable Development Goal 8.7.

³ International Labour Organisation (ILO) <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>

⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences. A/HRC/36/43, p. 8.

armed conflicts, natural disasters, and protracted unrest, lead to an increase in trafficking in persons and can also create new forms of trafficking. This is the consequence of a “culture of relativism [...] which drives one person to take advantage of another, to treat others as mere objects, imposing forced labour on them or enslaving them to pay their debts, (and) the same kind of thinking leads to the sexual exploitation of children”⁵.

Mr. President,

We must all be aware of these dramatic situations and work to eradicate the new and appalling forms of human slavery. There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that we are now facing a global phenomenon which exceeds the competence of any one, community or country, and that, as Pope Francis reminds us, “often, when considering [...] acknowledged or unacknowledged forms of slavery, one has the impression that they occur within a context of general indifference”⁶. In order to eliminate slavery and the correlated global indifference, we need a mobilization comparable in size to that of the phenomenon itself, we need awareness and concrete commitments of everybody, at the international, national and local level.

At the institutional level, prevention, protection and reintegration of the victims, legal persecution of perpetrators, and effective means of enforcement are needed. “States should take all steps necessary to provide services that ensure the rule of law in a fair, effective, non-discriminatory and accountable manner, and that such services are available and accessible nationwide”⁷. Moreover, we all agree that one strong driver of new forms of slavery is economic vulnerability. Preventing slavery, servitude, trafficking in persons and forced labour, thus means to “tackle the root causes and manifestation of discrimination”⁸ and poverty and the social acceptance of treating people as objects, and it further requires efforts to overcome the economic and social inequalities which perpetuate poverty without hope. Special attention must be reserved to women and girls, which represent the greater share of total forced labour, with 11.4 million victims, almost 55% of the total⁹. In this regard, the Holy See agrees with the Special Rapporteur that it is necessary to involve individual countries taking measures not only to prosecute traffickers and persecutors – a reactive and important response to violations – but also to take measures to protect victims. This should prevent victims from being re-victimized due to poverty and homelessness when they return to their country.

At the level of the Intergovernmental organizations, partnership and coordination of initiatives are necessary for combating the transnational networks of organized crime that oversee the trafficking in persons and the illegal trafficking of migrants. This represents recognition that responses to trafficking in persons must be integrated and holistic. At the level of business, the social responsibility of entrepreneurs on the one hand, and of consumers on the

⁵ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*, 123.

⁶ Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2015.

⁷ Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences. A/HRC/36/43, p. 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹ ILO Global Estimate of Forced Labour, 2012. Available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/--declaration/documents/publication/wcms_182004.pdf

other, is also invoked. Dignified working conditions and adequate salaries are to be ensured by the business leaders, but they must also be vigilant that forms of subjugation or trafficking in persons are not present in the distribution chain. The civil society, at its level, has the crucial task of awakening consciences and promoting initiatives for combating and uprooting the culture of enslavement. Finally, every human being is invited to practice acts of fraternity and to overcome indifference.

In conclusion Mr. President,

It is time to pass from laws to actions. As Pope Francis said, “the globalization of indifference [...] requires all of us to forge a new worldwide solidarity and fraternity capable of giving them new hope and helping them to advance with courage amid the problems of our time and the new horizons which they disclose”¹⁰. To this end, the new forms of slavery must be abolished in the same way as slavery in the ancient world was abolished: through the adoption of a new vision of the human being and his dignity, through legislation, through education and conversion of minds. Contemporary forms of slavery, servitude, trafficking in persons and forced labour should be addressed at their roots. This task begins with acknowledging the source of human dignity, with a clear understanding that all men and women are equal in dignity and thus no human being should be treated as a mere object or as a means to an end.

Thank you, Mr. President.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2015.