



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 41st Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 3 – Report of the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking
Geneva, 27 June 2019

Mr. President,

My Delegation takes note of the report and commends its special focus on the social inclusion of victims of trafficking into societies.

As Pope Francis recently said: “Our times have witnessed a growth of individualism and egocentricity, attitudes that tend to regard others through a lens of cool utility, valuing them according to criteria of convenience and personal benefit”.¹

Modern slavery is one of the gravest criminal offences with over 40 million² victims and an annual generated profit from trafficking in human beings of 32 billion dollars, making it the second most profitable business after the illegal arms trade.³ The exploitation takes many forms, including forced labour, sexual slavery, forced criminality, reproductive exploitation and organ harvesting, and is present in private, commercial, public and governmental enterprises. It affects the most vulnerable in our society such as women, children, the poorest, migrants, refugees and persons with disabilities. The effects are disastrous, with physical and psychological repercussions, social isolation, loss of self-esteem, emotional instability, and a high risk of being re-trafficked.

Global efforts to meet the goals to end all forms of slavery by 2030⁴ are still too uncoordinated. Our common fight to prevent this modern-day scourge needs to be accelerated, at local and international levels, not only by tackling the symptoms, but also the underlying causes. Too often, it is a lack of opportunities, abject poverty or conflicts that create dangerous situations in which desperation makes it easy to be exploited by criminals.

¹ Pope Francis, Address to participants at the International Conference on Human Trafficking, Synod Hall, Vatican, 11 April 2019.

² <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>

³ <http://santamartagroup.com/>

⁴ <https://www.unodc.org/southeastasiaandpacific/en/sustainable-development-goals.html>

The Migrants and Refugee Section of the Holy See recently published some guidelines, called “Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking” to help prevent vulnerable people from becoming trapped in slavery, to free those who are, to pursue relentlessly the criminals and eventually reintegrate victims into society in order to avoid the risk of re-trafficking.

Survivors need to be carefully protected and reintegrated into society by ensuring access to social protection, education, employment opportunities, health care, and to the justice system. They require help in order to be rehabilitated, “to pay off debts, secure accommodation, [and] learn new skills, [...]. Yet, human trafficking survivors tend to be overlooked, rejected, punished, or even scapegoated, as if the degrading things they were forced to do were in fact their own fault”.⁵

It is the obligation of the State to break this cycle of indifference and establish or improve programmes and mechanisms for protecting, rehabilitating and reintegrating victims of trafficking, allocating to them the economic resources seized from the traffickers.⁶

“This immense task, which requires courage, patience and perseverance, demands a joint and global effort on the part of the different actors that make up society. The churches must also play a role in this”.⁷

To conclude, modern forms of slavery should have no place in the contemporary world, they are immoral and utterly deplorable. It is thus our ethical duty to raise our voices on behalf of the victims and match our words with concrete actions, in order to dismantle trafficking, to leave humiliation and suffering behind and to give people a chance to live a life worthy of their human rights and dignity.

Thank you, Mr. President.

⁵ Migrant and Refugee Section, Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, “Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking”, January 2019, p.30. <https://migrants-refugees.va/documents/en/email/pastoral-orientations-on-human-trafficking.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Pope Francis, Video message to the participants in the International Forum on Modern Slavery, 7 May 2018.