



## The Holy See and the Efforts to Combat Trafficking: The Ongoing Commitment of the Catholic Church

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Seminar on

*Trafficking with a Special Focus on Children*

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It is my pleasure to address this Seminar on *Trafficking with a Special Focus on Children*, co-organised by the Embassy of Sweden to the Holy See and the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences. I heartily thank them for this timely initiative that aims at identifying measures to be taken, both at the national and international levels, in order to enhance the rights of children, and especially to better protect them from the scourge of trafficking.

This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*[1]. The Holy See was one of the first entities to ratify this important agreement, and it is also a party to some of its Optional Protocols, namely the *Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*[2] and the *Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography*[3].

As we all know, children continue to be the victims of many forms of violence and enslavement, and are trafficked for a variety of purposes. This persists despite diverse international and national action plans and strategies and in spite of the agreement and protocols already mentioned and other relevant international agreements, such as the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children*, and the *Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air*.

The ways in which children are horribly victimized include the **sale of organs**; recruitment for **prostitution, pornography** and the **narcotics** trade; **forced begging**; **disguised forms of cross-border adoption**; **forced marriage**; **recruitment as soldiers**; **enslavement by terrorist groups**; and **forced labour**, in both the formal and informal sectors, in domestic or agricultural workplaces or in the manufacturing and mining industries.

Many trafficked children are **unaccompanied migrant minors**, some of whom **lose their lives** in the migration process; while others, upon arriving at their destination after a gruelling journey marked by fear and insecurity, are **detained in often inhumane conditions**.

This demonstrates that international agreements and action plans, though necessary, are not able to put an end to the scourge of trafficking in children by themselves, if the international community fails to also address the root causes of this phenomenon.

The first of the root causes, I think, is **poverty** and **under-development**, especially when combined with a *lack of access to education* or *scarce employment opportunities*. In fact, not only do they provide a fertile ground where organised networks of traffickers can find potential victims, but they also push hopeless people into the pernicious path of criminality. It goes without saying that access to a **quality education** for all and the creation of **decent work opportunities** are, then, of crucial importance.

Secondly, at the source of trafficking in children, we often find **armed conflicts** and other situations of **violence** and **terrorism**. Children are trafficked to be recruited as soldiers or exploited, even sexually, by terrorist groups and other combatants. Thus, the Holy See has several times called upon the international community for vigorous diplomacy in order to put a final end to all armed conflicts, to all situations of violence and to terrorism.

Thirdly, I deplore the role played by **corruption**, as traffickers often require the complicity of intermediaries, be they law enforcement personnel, state officials, or civil and military institutions. In fact, trafficking in children as well as other forms of enslavement of children are still possible because we are living in a world "divided by greed looking for easy gain, wounded by the selfishness which threatens human life and the family"[4]. The fight against corruption must be raised to the highest of priorities; as Pope Francis recently said: "corruption is a greater ill than sin. More than forgiven, this ill must be treated"[5].

Finally, we must reverse the spread of the **"throw away" culture**, in which "human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded"[6]. Instead, we need to promote a culture of **fraternity**, in which the inherent dignity of each and every person, from conception to natural death, is respected and valued. Accordingly, to end trafficking of children, we must first achieve a **conversion of hearts and**

**minds.** Trafficked children are victims of the **demand** for low-cost labour and products, even in opulent societies – the desires of customers for organs, drugs, child prostitutes and child pornography, and so on.

The Holy See calls repeatedly in various *fora* for effective action on the scourge of human trafficking and its root causes. For example, in the recent UN Security Council Open Debate on *Children in Armed Conflict*[7], it strongly condemned the increasing abduction and forcible recruitment of children by armed groups. And in his most recent *Message for the World Day of Peace*, entitled *No Longer Slaves, but Brothers and Sisters*[8], Pope Francis encouraged religious congregations, Catholic-inspired organizations and all people of good will – in accordance with their specific roles and responsibilities – to take a proactive part in a common engagement against trafficking.

I pray that the present Seminar contribute significantly to this effort.

Thank you for your kind attention.

[1] The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989, and entered into force on 2 September 1990. The Holy See ratified this international agreement on 20 April 1990.

[2] The *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict* was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 May 2000 and entered into force on 12 February 2002. The Holy See ratified this Optional Protocol on 24 October 2001.

[3] The *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography* was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 May 2000 and entered into force on 18 January 2002. The Holy See ratified this Optional Protocol on 24 October 2001.

[4] Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi Message of Easter* 2013, 31 March 2013.

[5] Pope Francis, *Address to the Delegates of the International Association of Penal Law*, 23 October 2014.

[6] Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 53.

[7] Intervention of H.E. Archbishop Bernadito Auza, Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN, at the UN Security Council Open Debate on *Children in Armed Conflict*, New York, 25 March 2015, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/secretariat\\_state/2015/documents/rc-seg-st-20150325\\_auza-unsc\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2015/documents/rc-seg-st-20150325_auza-unsc_it.html).

[8] Pope Francis, *Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace 'No longer Slaves, but Brothers and Sisters'*, 1st January 2015, n.5.