



## Address of Her Holiness Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma)

---



Her Holiness Mata Amritanandamayi, best known as Amma (Mother) is a spiritual leader and humanitarian from Kerala, India. Born into the Hindu faith, Amma's vision is one that accepts all religions, seeing them all as different paths to Divinity. Her days are spent receiving the thousands of people who come to unburden their sorrows and share their problems with her, holding each individual who comes to her in a heartfelt motherly embrace.

### CEREMONY FOR THE SIGNING OF THE JOINT DECLARATION OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AGAINST SLAVERY

Casina Pio IV, Tuesday, 2 December 2014

Om Amriteshwaryai Namah

*Your Holiness and honoured guests...*

I would like to start by expressing my heartfelt appreciation for being able to participate in such an historic gathering. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the determination and social commitment of His Holiness. And to Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Respected Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, who has worked very hard to make this assembly a reality.

Human trafficking is one of the worst curses that plagues society, not only for this century, but since the beginning of time. The more we try to eradicate slavery and forced labour, it seems to rebound with double the strength. It is like an evil ghost that keeps haunting us. As His Holiness has stated, "Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society. It is a crime against humanity."

It is the duty of each country to implement laws that address and work to eradicate this extremely cruel and immoral crime and to liberate and protect victims from such a fate. It is also the moral responsibility of every citizen who is committed to justice and social welfare. However, we are all aware of the bitter truth that this problem cannot easily be solved, for the wound of human trafficking is centuries old and extremely deep-rooted.

Human trafficking rips apart the lives of innocent and helpless children, who embrace life with a heart full of sweet dreams for the future, but are left, in the end, destroyed and discarded.

We have been granted the blessing of life through God's compassion. This life is to be spent performing good deeds as an offering to God. To destroy another person's life is a misuse of God's gift. All living beings are instruments in the hands of the Divine.

The law of God's court is righteousness, or Dharma. Let us all strive to respect and follow this law. Human trafficking is unrighteous.

All religious leaders have the ability to help both the perpetrators – those who trap their fellow human beings in the net of human enslavement – as well as the victims who get caught in this net. They both need to be guided to the right path. Religious leaders should be prepared to fight this battle and uphold righteousness. This is not a war meant to kill. We need to be ready to fight a war to save the helpless from the grip of demonic minds. We don't want a response borne out of revenge due to perceived differences in caste, creed, religion, etc. Instead, we need to develop empathy, realising the divinity within each person.

The human mind has created many divisions in the form of religion, caste, language and national boundaries. Let us try to create a bridge of all-encompassing pure love to break down these self-created walls. Any hardened heart will soften in love. Love can spread light through even the densest darkness. Selfless love transforms

the mind from a demon that enslaves us into our own liberator. Those who traffic and enslave others have fallen prey to a negative mind. Religious leaders should, without ulterior motives, formulate an action plan of rehabilitation based on selfless love and spirituality, the essence of all faiths.

Remaining silent in the face of unrighteousness is unrighteous. Governments and political leaders have to establish laws without loopholes, so the guilty cannot escape, and these laws must be strictly enforced. In many countries, the government and various NGOs are fighting against human trafficking, but we see no reduction in the power and massive financial gain of those who make a business out of treating living beings as mere objects to be used and eventually discarded. The number of victims of this business is rapidly increasing. Like the roots of an enormous tree, the roots of this tragedy are pervading deeper and deeper into society. If we fail to do something effective against this injustice happening right in front of our eyes, it will constitute a travesty against future generations.

Victims of human trafficking lose their self-respect and fall into a pit of despair. They are often used by terrorists as drug mules, suicide bombers and for many other illegal activities. Some foods that we eat on a daily basis are produced by children who are forced to work day and night. Victim's kidneys and other body parts become commodities sold in the marketplace. When these victims are no longer useful and have developed psychological problems as a result of abuse or have contracted incurable diseases such as AIDS, they are finally thrown out onto the streets.

I have personally seen and listened to thousands upon thousands of examples of human trafficking. Once, a woman came to me and burst into tears. She said, "Amma, I have AIDS. My only desire is to see my child before I die. Please help me." When Amma asked what had happened, she said, "When I was nine years old, I was working as a domestic servant for a family. There I met an elderly man. He said he could give me a better salary and promised me many other benefits. Because my family had so many financial problems, I left with him. When we reached the new place, I saw that there were many other girls there. I wasn't allowed to speak to any of them. Finally, I realised it was a brothel. Men started to rape me regularly. At first, I felt angry as well as guilty for what I was being made to do. But, as time went by, I lost all sense of dignity and even started to find pleasure in my work."

After 5 years, I gave birth to a girl. They let me breast feed my baby for the first month, then suddenly took her away from me. After a few more years, I was diagnosed with HIV. They stopped allowing me to see my child. When I became really sick, they said they were going to take me to a hospital but, instead, they abandoned me. I begged them to let me see my child just one more time, but they never agreed. They didn't even take me back to the brothel. Everyone I approached for help treated me with disgust and loathing. The only thing they didn't do is throw stones at me. All doors close in my face. I cannot live in this world anymore. I just want to see my child once more before I die. Will they inject her with hormones to make her look older, use her like they used me and eventually throw her out?" Hearing her pathetic story, I sent some people to go and try to find her daughter. It was a difficult task.

Some other women also narrated their horrifying story to Amma, "A man used to visit us regularly. He would help out with whatever was needed, and we became very comfortable with him. After a while, he offered to take our children abroad to work in his friend's company. He promised to send back large amounts of money each month. He gave each of us an advance payment of Rs. 1000. He took our children with him. We have not seen him or our children since. We are not sure where our children are, but we heard that they were taken to a brothel. When people went to search the brothel, they were told that the children had already been trafficked from there." Saying this, they burst into tears.

Today the value of everything has increased. Men sell their sperm and women their ova for a great deal of money. But ironically, in many countries, a child can be purchased for prostitution or forced labour for a pathetic sum of ten to twenty dollars.

Human trafficking is a complex problem. The solution needs to be multifaceted. We must address the aspect of dharma (or doing the right thing), the compelling aspect of poverty, legal aspects, etc. Social service and awareness campaigns also have a huge role to play in this process. Considering all aspects, we will only be able to improve this situation with a collaborative approach.

In spite of taking regular medications, if a diabetic continues to eat sweet food, their blood sugar level will increase. Diet control and lifestyle modification are more important than medication. In the case of impoverished children who lack access to proper education because schools are scarce, resulting in many children only going to fourth or eight grade, money alone will not improve the situation. We need to provide the new generation as well as victims of human trafficking with a practical education that will help create a greater awareness within them. We need to awaken their latent courage and self-confidence, to help them arise. They need to realise

that they are not helpless and vulnerable like kittens; they are mighty and courageous lions. We have to help them elevate their minds.

There are two types of education: education for a living and education for life. When we study in college, striving to become a doctor, lawyer, or engineer – this is education for a living. On the other hand, education for life requires an understanding of the essential principles of spirituality. The real goal of education is not to create people who can understand only the language of machines. The main purpose of education should be to impart a culture of the heart – a culture based on enduring values.

When Amma's devotees go to villages to give vocational training, women are also given sex education and life enrichment education. As a result, many young women have been able to save themselves from people trying to sell them for prostitution, sometimes even their own parents. Amma has been able to help 80% of the women who were forced into prostitution and came to her for help. But, the other 20% are continuing the same way of life. They do not want to change and Amma has also not tried to force them to do anything.

Lust is a kind of hunger. Even if we feel hungry, we don't devour everything we can get our hands on. If we go to a restaurant and order food, the people around us may have ordered a variety of different dishes. We may think, "I wish I had ordered that dish instead," but even if we feel this way, we will exercise a certain amount of restraint. In this manner, we need to exercise restraint for everything in life, especially lust.

Spiritual values need to be inculcated at a young age. When Amma was a child, her mother would say, "Never urinate in the river. The river is the Divine Mother." When we swam in the backwaters, even though the water was cold, remembering our mother's words, we could restrain ourselves. When we develop a reverential attitude towards a river, we will never defile it. Our respect towards the river helped to keep it clean, and a clean river ultimately benefits everyone who uses it. It's not important to debate whether God exists or not. What is important is that devotion and faith in God help to sustain good values and righteousness in society. These values are what bring balance to society and the entire creation.

Roads are meant for vehicles to drive on, but if we say "I can drive however I wish," we may get into an accident. Just as there are traffic rules, there are similar rules for everything in life. Spiritual values help us to live according to these rules.

Many people are working hard to put a stop to child labour. But just by banning it, we will not be able to solve the problem. Once, a man brought a 10 year old boy to Amma. He wanted Amma to raise the boy in the ashram, and told her the story of how he became an orphan. His father had died two years before, so his mother and sister went to work in a matchbox factory near their home. His mother was diagnosed with chronic kidney disease and was unable to work as she was bedridden. Even though his sister was paid very little, it was just enough to make ends meet. After a while, laws were established that banned child labour. The owner of the matchbox factory was arrested, and his company was shut down. All the children working there were let go. Distraught at the loss of their only source of income, the mother sent her son to school in the morning and then she poisoned her daughter and herself.

It is justifiable to shut down such factories, but we often forget the families of the young children who depend on these factories in order to live. In our attempt to resolve a problem, if we only see one aspect and fail to see the other, the repercussions are experienced by people who have no one to turn to. Before we push drastically to stop child labour and human trafficking, first we need to build a foundation to help these families become self-sufficient and ensure their future.

Spirituality begins and culminates in compassion. If we could transform compassion from a mere word into a path of action, we would be able to solve 90% of the worlds' humanitarian problems. There are two types of poverty in the world. The first type is due to the lack of food, clothing and shelter. The second type is the poverty of love and compassion. We need to tackle the second type of poverty first. If we have love and compassion, we will wholeheartedly serve and help those who lack food, clothing and shelter.

According to the Bhagavad Gita, the Creator and creation are one, just as waves and the ocean are one and the same. Though we may see a thousand suns reflected in a thousand pots of water, there is only one sun. Likewise, the consciousness within all of us is the same. Just as one hand spontaneously reaches out to soothe the other hand when it is in pain, may we all console and support others as we would ourself.

People from all nations and religions become victims to the ravaging effects of human enslavement and experience extreme abuse and suffering. Their physical and mental pain does not differentiate between language, race or skin colour. These victims are just a single group of humans, struggling against the clutches of endless sorrow and emotional suppression.

There are antibiotic ointments that aid in the healing of external wounds. Similarly, there are many different kinds of medication available to treat diseases of our internal organs. But there is only one medicine that can

heal the wounds of our mind. This medicine is pure Love. In order to heal the mental and emotional wounds inflicted upon the victims of human trafficking, we need to care for them with selfless love. This will bring them into the light of a free life, away from the darkness forcefully imposed upon them in the past. We need to create a large task force of social servants to carry out this sacred mission. Only religious and spiritual leaders can bring together such a task force.

May the inherent compassion within all living beings awaken. May we all develop the discernment to love and respect life and those living around us. We are not isolated islands but interconnected links on the chain of God's creation. May we realise this great truth. May we see others' pain as our pain and their happiness as our happiness. May we forget all the pain and the suffering of the past, and forgive all the hurt we have experienced. May we bow down in reverence to all that is good in the world, and find eternal happiness.