



## Address of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew



Patriarch Bartholomew I is the 270th and current Archbishop of Constantinople - New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch, since 2 November 1991. As such, he is "first among equals" in the Eastern Orthodox Church, and thus regarded as the spiritual leader of the world's 300 million Orthodox Christians.

CEREMONY FOR THE SIGNING OF THE JOINT DECLARATION OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AGAINST SLAVERY Casina Pio IV, Tuesday, 2 December 2014

*Dear friends,*

It is a special privilege and a sincere pleasure to respond to the invitation of our beloved brothers, His Holiness Pope Francis and His Grace Archbishop Justin of Canterbury as co-founders of the Global Freedom Network, to address your assembly and to support your Universal Declaration against modern slavery.

We would like to assure you that we stand with you in solidarity and commitment to eradicate modern expressions of slavery, which are a disgrace to God, a dishonor to humankind, and a degradation of all its innocent victims fashioned in the image and likeness of our heavenly Creator.

There are three observations that we would like to bring to your attention about the moral imperative to abolish human trafficking and forced labor:

- First, *how ironic and, moreover, how tragic* that in the twenty-first century, we are still responding to the moral challenge of slavery! Indeed, the slavery that we witness and confront is more inhumane and more malevolent than similar phenomena in the early Christian centuries or even in more recent centuries. For today we are addressing and responding to an invisible, clandestine and underground reality – one that shamelessly exploits and mercilessly undermines both men and women of all ages, race and religion through such criminal and abusive measures as human trafficking, forced labor, prostitution and organ trafficking.

- Second, *how ironic and, moreover, how tragic* that once again the most profoundly and negatively affected are the vulnerable and poor of our world! It is foolish and arrogant for people with power and wealth to imagine that they can seize possession or acquire ownership of other people's labor for purposes of greed and profit. It is sinful and immoral for people to capitalize on and exploit the body or physical organs of others as if these were somehow distinct or disconnected from their soul and spirit. And it is certainly blasphemous and hubris to reduce any one of our brothers and sisters – irrespective of gender, race and age – to a single aspect of the mystery and destiny for which they were created by the living God. The body and productivity of others are not ours to own; they are only ours to respect and treat with dignity.

- Third, *how ironic and, moreover, how tragic* that – while we strive to establish thresholds and deadlines to protect the natural environment as God's gift to the world – we nevertheless remain unaware and indifferent to the oppressive abuse of human beings bearing the very seal of divine grace. We have not yet understood that ecological pollution and destruction on the one hand and human slavery and exploitation on the other hand are two sides of the same coin. It is our human and divine vocation to remember and recognize that the way that we treat our neighbor is directly related to the way that we care for our environment. And by the same token, the way that we respond to our environment is immediately reflected in the way that we behave toward other human beings.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us always hold before our eyes and our hearts that “the earth is the Lord’s; and all that is within it” (Psalm 24.1) – including every human being, as well as every bodily organ. God alone is the Lord of all humanity and the landlord of all creation. To Him belong all glory, honor and worship. Amen.