



The Santa Marta Group is an alliance of international police chiefs and bishops from around the world working together with civil society in a process endorsed by Pope Francis, to eradicate human trafficking and modern day slavery. The Pope describes trafficking as “an open wound on the body of contemporary society”.

Pope Francis' Message and Blessing for the Santa Marta Group *El Escorial*, 30-31 October 2015

The fact that the Santa Marta Group, made up of bishops and police chiefs, is meeting again, in the symbolic Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial in Spain, provokes in me great happiness and pastoral contentment. During the short period of its existence this group has achieved a great deal and it is called to a decisive task – that of the eradication of new forms of slavery. This year certain important institutional developments have taken place which without doubt can support your activities and cooperate with the beneficial role of the Santa Marta Group. I am referring, on the one hand, to the meeting of mayors which took place in the Vatican City on 28 April and at which I spoke. At this meeting these important figures signed a declaration by which they committed themselves to eradicating new forms of slavery which they condemned as a crime against humanity.

On the other, I would also like to mention the recent approval of the sustainable development goals (SDG) of the United Nations whose target 8.7 reads: ‘Take 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, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms’.

As I thought advisable to observe immediately before the unanimous approval of these goals in my address to the United Nations in New York on 25 September of this year: ‘Our world demands of all government leaders a will which is effective, practical and constant, concrete steps and immediate measures for preserving and improving the natural environment and thus putting an end as quickly as possible to the phenomenon of social and economic exclusion, with its baneful consequences: human trafficking, the marketing of human organs and tissues, the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, slave labour, including prostitution, the drug and weapons trade, terrorism and international organized crime. Such is the magnitude of these situations and their toll in innocent lives, that we must avoid every temptation to fall into a declarationist nominalism which would assuage our consciences. We need to ensure that our institutions are truly effective in the struggle against all these scourges’.

Today the 193 States that belong to the UN have a new moral imperative to combat human trafficking which is a real crime against humanity. Cooperation between bishops and police chiefs, each with their own mission and nature, in order to discover the best practices by which carry out this delicate task, and to communicate them to each other, will be a decisive step in ensuring that governments reach the victims of human trafficking in a direct, immediate, constant, effective and concrete way. You, bishop and police chiefs, by your mission are called to be near to these victims and to accompany them on a pathway of dignity and freedom. This is what our many brothers and sisters who suffer because of human trafficking must perceive. Today, dear members

of the Santa Marta Group, in this delicate task you are not alone; you can rely upon the support of the most enlightened mayors and the UN because of the commitments that they have made. Thanks be to God.

For my part, I ask Almighty God to give you the grace to carry out this mission, which is so delicate, so humanitarian and so Christian, of healing the open and painful wounds of humanity, which are also the wounds of Christ. I assure you all of my support and my prayers, and the support and the prayers of the faithful of the Catholic Church. With the help of God and your cooperation, this indispensable service of the Santa Marta Group will be able to liberate the victims of new forms of slavery, rehabilitate the excluded, unmask the traffickers and those who create this market, and provide effective help to cities and nations: a service for the common good and the promotion of human dignity that will achieve the best for each person and each citizen. God bless you!