



Locating the Fight Against Modern Slavery at the Heart of Efforts to Deliver Sustainable Development

#MayorsCare Summit on

Modern Slavery and Climate Change: The Commitment of the Cities

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Your Excellences,

Mayors,

Distinguished guests,

I would like to thank my good friend Monsignor Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo for the invitation and privilege of being here with you today. I am honoured to participate in this distinguished gathering on the two most pressing issues of our time. And I was very humbled at hearing the accounts from Karla and Ana Laura this morning, who are the very people that I work for.

In the United Kingdom we have adopted modern slavery as an umbrella term. The world “trafficking” implicitly indicates movement, and whilst people are often trafficked to be abused, it is the exploitation and loss of freedom that should be of most concern. It is the enslavement of our fellow citizens. Two statements that Pope Francis has consistently repeated from the beginning of his pontificate are that human trafficking is modern slavery, and that this practice is a crime against humanity.

Modern slavery in 2015 manifests itself in many insidious forms, including forced labour, child slavery, forced marriage, and all forms of trafficking in persons, including for sexual exploitation, forced criminality, organ removal and domestic servitude. Slavery has existed for thousands of years but economic and social forces have enabled its alarming resurgence over recent decades. The population explosion has tripled the number of people in the world and in many places the population has grown faster than the economy. Millions are migrating from impoverished rural areas to cities, and from poorer countries to wealthier ones in search of work. Criminals deceive them by posing as legitimate labour recruiters and there is an ever-growing demand for cheap labour. The slavery we see today exists for the same purpose as it has throughout history: to maximise profit for exploiters by minimising or eliminating the cost of labour.

Climate change is also having a devastating impact. The multiple forms of disaster that are resulting from climate change, including natural disasters, the sinking of small island states, and violent conflicts triggered by decreases in essential resources are all adding to the scale and severity of human displacement across the globe.

Research published this year by the International Organization for Migration examined natural disasters, armed conflict, including in Syria and Iraq, and protracted crises and conflict migration such as the migration through North Africa. It found that all these crises situations not only exacerbated existing vulnerabilities to the manifestations of slavery and trafficking, but also caused new forms to emerge. All these forms of crisis have displaced huge numbers of people, many of whom are extremely vulnerable to exploitation by criminal traffickers. In spite of this, counter-slavery efforts and the protection of vulnerable migrants currently remain at the margins of humanitarian responses. Modern slavery, of course, has a devastating impact on individual victims, but it also has wider negative implications for human development. It results in a huge loss of remittances to developing countries. Remittance flows are taken from victims who are forced to pay off debts and become the profits for the criminals. And there is the impact on the families left behind. Victims cannot care for their children or the elderly. Many are young, so modern slavery robs communities of those that could contribute the most to local development. Modern slavery is a health problem, as trafficked women and children are most at risk of HIV infection. And it is a gender problem, as unequal power relations reinforce women’s secondary status in society.

So what are the solutions? There are three key pillars. The first pillar is a policy approach that locates the fight against modern slavery as part of the strategy to deliver sustainable development. Unfortunately, although many victims are trafficked from developing countries, to date modern slavery and development have been treated as separate policy areas. A focus on development that ignores slavery can have negative

impacts. Development policy often focuses on the very poor. Pushing people over the poverty line without safeguards can result in higher levels of dangerous migration as people move out of abject poverty and raise their aspirations but this can have unintended consequences of creating a larger pool of potential victims of trafficking, enabling criminals to take advantage of their desire for a better future.

However, there is currently no specific mention of slavery within the United Nations post-2015 development agenda. In a period of time between now and when Pope Francis opens the Heads of State Summit at the United Nations in September there is likely to be a small window of opportunity to sharpen the language of the Sustainable Development Goals. I have been working closely with Monsignor Sánchez Sorondo, Professor Archer and the Pontifical Academies on this very agenda. We do not call for major changes, but a small amount of minor drafting improvements of the targets that will ensure greater focus to eradicating modern slavery through specifically referencing the eradication of all forms of modern slavery, including child slavery, and recognizing the role of supply chain transparency in ensuring that businesses are free from slave labour. It is positive that the current target focuses on the elimination of violence against women and girls, including trafficking. But it is crucial that the eradication of all forms of modern slavery is referenced, affecting women and girls, and men and boys, and not just those involved in trafficking. And whilst the Sustainable Development Goals give strong recognition to combating child labour, they do not specifically address child slavery. Whilst the growing global number of children in child labour has declined by one third since the year 2000, child slavery is at an all time high: 5.5 million children around the world are losing their childhood to slavery, and many companies benefit whether knowingly or unknowingly from slave labour. In order to demonstrate leadership on the issue, the United Kingdom is introducing a legal duty on all businesses above a certain turnover threshold to disclose measures taken to ensure that slavery does not take place in their supply chains anywhere in the world. The United Kingdom is the first country in the world to introduce such legislation, though it has been modelled on state legislation introduced in California.

The second pillar, and linked to these wider, long-term development efforts, is the immediate integration of protection against slavery and trafficking into the core of humanitarian response efforts.

And the third and most crucial pillar in order to achieve the change required to tackle modern slavery, we need leadership. It is only over recent years that we have become aware of the true nature and scale of modern slavery that is taking place across our cities and nations that require responses complex and multi-faceted and must include prevention measures, criminal justice improvements, enhanced support for victims and innovative partnerships. Such diverse activities require bespoke leadership. The act was the view of the British Government by introducing a Modern Slavery Act in 2015. This Act created my role to spearhead the United Kingdom's response. Very few countries have an equivalent, but I would be delighted to see the introduction of Commissioners across the world, which could become the network to coordinate the anti-slavery efforts.

We also need mayors to support the groundbreaking work of the Santa Marta Group. As Monsignor Sánchez Sorondo has stated, police chiefs leading this work report to Mayors, and crucially Pope Francis and the Pontifical Academy, by focusing global attention on these issues and through bringing together international leaders in these forums, are giving us both the moral leadership and space to achieve this change.

I will finish. I will quote a great British Parliamentarian, William Wilberforce, when he spoke of his vision in the face of adversity to criminalize the slave trade in the 1800s. He said: "Great indeed are our opportunities; great also are our responsibilities". If we can follow the example of the Church and demonstrate our own moral leadership, we again have a real opportunity to fight back against this cruel trade and as a result our collective responsibilities have never been greater. Thank you very much.