



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFERENCE ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING
ORGANIZED BY THE "SANTA MARTA GROUP"
[MADRID, 30-31 OCTOBER 2015]**

Your Majesty, Bishops, Distinguished Authorities, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great joy and pastoral satisfaction that the Santa Marta Group has once again gathered in the symbolic Monastery of St Lawrence of El Escorial, Spain. In its brief existence, this praiseworthy group has been able to achieve much and is called to a decisive task in the eradication of the new forms of slavery. In the course of this year, there have been several significant institutional innovations, which undoubtedly can sustain your activity and collaborate in the charitable activity of the Santa Marta Group. I am referring to the 21 July meeting of the Bishops in Vatican City, whom I addressed. In that encounter, those important figures signed a declaration by which they personally committed themselves to eradicating the new forms of slavery, which they condemn as a crime against humanity.

I would also like to mention the recent approval of the 2030 Agenda, with the new objectives of sustainable development of the United Nations Organization, whose Goal 8.7 states: "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 had the opportunity to affirm just before the unanimous approval of this Agenda in my address to the United Nations Organization in New York this past 25 September: "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 on 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 who belong to the UN have a new moral imperative to fight human trafficking, an authentic crime against humanity. Cooperation between the Bishops and civil authorities, each according to their own mission and proper nature, to the end of discovering the best practices to accomplish this delicate task, is a decisive step in assuring themselves that the will of the governments reaches the victims in a direct, immediate, constant, effective and tangible way. You, ecclesiastical and civil authorities, are called to remain beside the victims and to accompany them in their journey of dignity and freedom. This must be felt by the many brothers and many sisters, victims of human trafficking. Today you, dear members of the Santa Marta Group, are not alone in this delicate undertaking: you can count on the support of the most enlightened mayors and on that of the whole international community, given the respective commitment they have undertaken and signed. Let us give thanks to God.

From my part, I ask Almighty God to give you the grace to carry forward this most delicate, most humanitarian and most Christian mission, to heal the open and painful wounds of humanity, which are also the scourge of Christ. I assure you all of my support and my prayers, and of the support and prayers of the faithful of the Catholic Church. With God's help and with your cooperation, this indispensable service of the Santa Marta Group will be able to free the victims of the new forms of slavery, to rehabilitate them, along with detainees and the excluded, to unmask the traffickers and those who create this market, and to offer effective assistance to cities and nations; a service for the common good, and for the promotion of human dignity, that it may be able to draw out the best of every person and of every citizen. May God bless you all.

Vatican, 28 October 2015

FRANCIS