



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE
60th INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF FORENSIC TOXICOLOGISTS**

[Rome, 27-31 August 2023]

Dear brothers and sisters!

I address a cordial greeting to the participants in the 60th International Congress of Forensic Toxicologists, taking place in Rome from 27 to 31 August 2023.

I wish to thank you for the commitment, time and energy you devote to the prevention and the fight against drug addiction, including through days of study and cultural awareness on the subject, which involve numerous professionals and some young researchers.

The phenomenon of drug and psychotropic substance abuse continues to cause alarm and concern, especially due to the growth in consumption among adolescents and young people and, consequently, the increase in drug sales on the “digital marketplaces” of the dark web. Adolescence and youth, as we know, are particularly delicate phases in a person’s life, characterized by considerable physical, emotional and social changes. Added to this is the fact that our current societies are in many ways fragile and marked by an underlying insecurity. One can then be drawn into the compulsive search for new experiences out of the need to measure oneself against the unprecedented, out of the desire to explore the unknown, but also to silence the fear of feeling excluded and the need to socialize with peers. These are highly risky factors, which can induce young people into dangerous choices and behaviour, such as the use of psychoactive substances and alcohol abuse, or to the possibility of encountering extreme situations, both virtual and real.

All this represents a fertile ground for the use of toxic substances. Among these, the new psychoactive substances (NPS) pose a serious and complex problem in the current addiction

landscape, with a rapidly expanding market, uncertain toxicological effects and serious public health consequences. The ease of chemically modifying these substances also allows organized crime to evade legal controls, making it more difficult to detect illicit compounds. Many adolescents abuse NPS without knowing their danger. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to develop testing techniques, as well as preventive interventions aimed at curbing their proliferation and encouraging appropriate treatment plans.

There is also an increase in the spread of doping substances, particularly in the competitive and sporting spheres. The use of doping substances in sport manifests the obsession with achieving major goals and performance results at all costs. The phenomenon, of course, is an indicator of something more deep-rooted, implying the importance of a reflection on our society today, pervaded by a culture of efficiency and productivity, which does not allow for hesitations and failures. The need to always appear to live up to expectations, displaying to the outside world an image of oneself that is high-performing and successful, from which all fragility and weakness is banished, becomes an insurmountable obstacle to the pursuit of integral human development.

Thus, disoriented and often deprived of points of reference, many young people pursue the illusion of finding in drug use a reprieve from anguish and lack of meaning: it is the “vain hope” of a stupefaction that relieves them of the fatigue of being and existing, often concealed under the disguise of a desire for escape and fun. We cannot forget, then, that behind every addiction there are concrete experiences, stories of loneliness, inequality, exclusion, lack of integration. Faced with these situations, we cannot be indifferent. The Lord Jesus paused, drew near, healed wounds. In the style of his closeness, we too are called to act, to pause before situations of fragility and pain, to know how to listen to the cry of loneliness and anguish, to stoop to lift up and bring back to life those who fall into the slavery of drugs.

I hope that the results of your work will contribute to the identification of educational, therapeutic and rehabilitative pathways, capable of preventing and combating the scourge of drugs, favouring alternative cultural models and encouraging the search for reasons to live in those - especially the youngest - who have lost them. May your scientific and cultural work bear the hoped-for fruits! I entrust you to the intercession of Mary, our caring Mother, and I bless you from my heart.

Francis

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 26 August 2023

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