



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
IN THE MEETING SPONSORED BY THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE,
"THE CHURCH AND GYPSIES:
TO ANNOUNCE THE GOSPEL IN THE PERIPHERIES"**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 5 June 2014*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On the occasion of the World Meeting of Episcopal Promoters and National Directors of the Pastoral Care of Gypsies, I welcome you and offer my cordial greeting to everyone. I would like to thank Cardinal Antonio Maria Vegliò for his introductory words. The theme of your meeting is “The Church and the gypsies: to announce the Gospel in the peripheries”. Within this theme is most importantly the memory of a relationship, that of the ecclesial community and the gypsy people, the history of a path of getting to know one another, of meeting each other; and then there is today’s challenge, a challenge for both ordinary pastoral care and for the new evangelization.

Gypsies are often found on the fringes of society, and are sometimes viewed with hostility and suspicion — I remember many times here in Rome when a few gypsies climbed on the bus, the driver said: “Watch out for your wallets!”. This is repugnant. Perhaps it is true, but it’s repugnant.... — [Gypsies] are poorly represented in the political, economic and social dynamics of the region. We know it is a complex reality but it is also certain that the gypsy people are called upon to contribute to the common good, and this is possible with appropriate plans for joint responsibility, in the observance of duties and the promotion of the rights of each person.

Among the causes in today’s society which create situations of poverty in part of the population, we can identify the lack of educational structures for cultural and professional development, the difficulty in accessing healthcare, the discrimination in the labour market and the shortage of

decent housing. If these tears in the social fabric strike everyone indistinctly, the weakest groups are those who most easily become victims of the new forms of slavery. It is in fact the least protected persons who fall into the trap of exploitation, forced indigence and varied forms of abuse. Gypsies are among the most vulnerable, especially when there is no support for the integration and promotion of the person in the various dimensions of civic life.

Here the solicitude of the Church and your special contribution entwine. The Gospel indeed is a proclamation of joy for everyone and, in a special way, for the weakest and the marginalized. We are called to assure them of our closeness and our solidarity, based on the example of Jesus Christ who gave witness to the Father's predilection for them.

Alongside this action of solidarity for the benefit of the gypsy people, it is necessary to have the commitment of local and national institutions and the support of the international community, to identify proposals and interventions geared toward improving the quality of life. In the face of the difficulties and disadvantages of our brothers and sisters, everyone must feel called to place the dignity of every human being at the centre of their attention. With regard to the situation of gypsies all over the world, today it is more important than ever to develop new approaches in civil, cultural and social spheres, as well as in the pastoral strategy of the Church, in order to face the challenges emerging from the modern forms of persecution, oppression and, at times, also slavery.

I encourage you to generously carry on with your important work, to not become discouraged, but to continue to commit yourselves in favour of those who are most likely to find themselves in conditions of need and marginalization, on the peripheries of humanity. Gypsies can find in you brothers and sisters who love them with the same love that Christ had for the most marginalized. You are for them the welcoming and joyous face of the Church.

I invoke upon each of you and on your work the motherly protection of the Virgin Mary. Thank you very much, pray for me.