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The Holy See at the United Nations: Eliminating the trafficking of children and young people

Vatican City, 19 July 2016 – Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Holy See Permanent Observer at the United Nations, gave a speech on 13 July dedicated to the elimination of trafficking in children and young people, in the context of the current debate in the assembly on this theme.

"The Holy See has long spoken out against the evil of human trafficking, forced labour and all forms of modern slavery. And through the dedicated work of so many Catholic religious institutes, national and diocesan programs, and groups of faithful the Catholic Church has sought to fight to address its various causes, care for those it victimises, wake people up to the scourge, and work with anyone and everyone to try to eliminate it".

He went on to note that Pope Francis had dedicated his Message for World Day of Peace 2015 to this theme, making it a priority of international diplomacy for the Holy See. He has spoken about it to newly accredited diplomats, to international religious leaders, to an alliance of international police chiefs and Church leaders, to social scientists and scholars, to mayors from across the globe, to judges and to various conferences throughout the world. "He hasn't merely been talking", the nuncio added. "He has been taking action, catalysing the Holy See's hosting conferences, spearheading the 2014 Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders against Modern Slavery and willed the creation of the Santa Marta Group, named after his residence in the Vatican, which brings together Catholic leaders and international law enforcement officials to battle this scourge".

The Holy Father's essential message is that human trafficking is an "open wound on the body of contemporary society", "a crime against humanity", and an "atrocious scourge that is occurring in many of our own neighbourhoods". "When he was here at the UN last September, he called for concrete steps and immediate measures for ... putting an end as quickly as possible to the phenomenon of ... human trafficking, ... the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, [and] slave labour, including prostitution, stressing, 'We need to ensure that our institutions are truly effective in the struggle against all these scourges'". Archbishop Auza emphasised that to this end, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was an important sign of hope, insofar as it focused, in three different targets, on the world's attention and commitment to confronting this plague.

The Permanent Observer noted that in Targets 5.2 and 8.7, the international community committed itself to "eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking

and sexual and other types of exploitation", and "take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking", while in the current conference, the focus is on the third commitment relating to eliminating modern slavery, Target 16.2, which requires that the international community end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children by 2030.

"The trafficking of anyone, no matter what age, is a crime against humanity. But there is something particularly abominable about submitting children to these barbarities", he commented. "As a Christian and a Catholic bishop, I cannot fail to recall how Jesus reserves his strongest condemnation for those who hurt children, saying that it would be better for such violators to have a millstone tied around their neck and thrown into the depth of the sea than to face God's judgement for such deeds. Jesus said this because he knows that children are particularly vulnerable and owed a higher level of loving protection. While human trafficking always exploits the vulnerable, the trafficking of children and youth exploits those most vulnerable of all, something that not only exposes the evil of trafficking in all its repulsive ugliness but something that likewise makes abundantly clear the urgent call for everyone to rise up to protect children, youth and everyone from those who would enslave and dehumanise them in these ways".

"This conference will seek to make real the faces of the nearly two million children and youth who are presently being trafficked and speak about what is working, what is not working, and what needs to be done to free them, help them recover, and prevent other young people from suffering as they have", he concluded.

The Conference will also present the work carried out in this area by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Labour Organisation, and will explore two particularly troubling dimensions of the crisis: the trafficking of the young homeless and the use of the internet to enslave and traffic the young.
