



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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General Audience

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.00 in Saint Peter's Square, where the Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world.

In his address in Italian, the Pope focused on the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, held today (Bible reading: *1 Cor 6:12-14*).

After summarizing his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful present.

The General Audience concluded with the recitation of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Catechesis of the Holy Father on the occasion of the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning! I can't hear you!

Today is *International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking*, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1987. This year's theme is *The evidence is clear: Invest in prevention*.

Saint John Paul ii affirmed that "drug abuse impoverishes every community where it exists. It diminishes human strength and moral fibre. It undermines esteemed values. It destroys the will to live and to contribute to a better society". [1] This drives the abuse of drugs and the use of drugs. At the same time, however, let us remember that each addict "has a unique personal story and must be listened to, understood, loved, and, insofar as possible, healed and purified... They continue to possess, more than ever, a dignity as children of God". [2] Everyone has dignity.

However, we cannot ignore the evil intentions and actions of drug dealers and traffickers. They are murderers! Pope Benedict xvi used stern words during a visit to a rehabilitation centre: “I therefore urge the drug dealers to reflect on the grave harm they are inflicting on countless young people and on adults from every level of society: God will call you to account for your deeds. Human dignity cannot be trampled upon in this way”. [3] And drugs trample on human dignity.

A reduction in drug addiction is not achieved by liberalizing drug use — this is a fantasy — as has been proposed, or already implemented, in some countries. Liberalize, and consumption increases. Having known so many tragic stories of drug addicts and their families, I am convinced that it is a moral duty to end the production and trafficking of these dangerous substances. How many traffickers of death there are — because drug traffickers are traffickers of death — driven by the logic of power and money at any cost! And this scourge, which produces violence and sows suffering and death, demands an act of courage from society as a whole.

Drug production and trafficking also have a destructive impact on our common home. This has become increasingly evident, for example, in the Amazon basin.

Another key way to counter drug abuse and trafficking is through *prevention*, by promoting greater justice, educating young people in values that build personal and community life, accompanying those in need, and giving hope for the future.

I was able to visit several rehabilitation centres inspired by the Gospel, during my apostolic journeys in various dioceses and countries. They are a strong and hopeful witness to the commitment of priests, consecrated men and women, and lay people to put into practice the parable of the Good Samaritan. I am also comforted by the efforts undertaken by various bishops’ conferences to promote just legislation and policies regarding the treatment of people addicted to drug use, and prevention to stop this scourge.

As an example, I point to the network of *La Pastoral Latinoamericana de Acompañamiento y Prevención de Adicciones* (plapa). The charter of this network recognizes that “addiction to alcohol, psychoactive substances, and other forms of addiction (pornography, new technologies, etc.) ... is a problem that affects us indiscriminately, beyond geographical, social, cultural, religious and age differences. Despite the differences ... we want to organize as a community: to share experiences, enthusiasm, difficulties”. [4]

I also mention the Bishops of southern Africa, who convened a meeting in November 2023 on the theme, “*Empowering youth as agents of peace and hope*”. Youth representatives who participated in the meeting described it as a “significant milestone geared towards a healthy and active youth throughout the region”. They also made a promise: “We accept the role of being Ambassadors and Advocates who are going to fight against the use of substances. We plead with all young people to be empathetic to one another at all times”. [5]

Dear brothers and sisters, faced with the tragic situation of the drug addiction of millions of people around the world, faced with the scandal of the illicit production and trafficking of such drugs, “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”. [6] And we pray for those criminals who give drugs to young people: they are criminals, they are murderers! Let us pray for their conversion.

On this International Day against drugs, as Christians and church communities, let us pray for this intention and renew our commitment of prayer and work against drugs. Thank you!

[1] *Message to representatives of the International Conference on “Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking”* (4 June 1987).

[2] Address to participants in the meeting sponsored by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on “Narcotics: Problems and Solutions to this Global Issue” (24 November 2016).

[3] Address to the community living in “Fazenda da Esperança”, Brazil, 12 May 2007.

[4] <https://adn.celam.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Carta-a-la-Iglesia-de-ALC-PLAPA-14sept2023-CL.pdf>

[5] <https://imbisa.africa/2023/11/21/statement-following-the-imbisa-youth-meeting/>

[6] Message to the participants in the 60th International Congress of Forensic Toxicologists (26 August 2023).

Greeting in English

I extend a warm welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially the groups from England, Germany, Congo, Australia, India, the Philippines, Vietnam and the United States of America. In a particular way, I greet the many student groups, together with their teachers. Upon you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you all!
