

## IX° International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking 2023

*"Only to do right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God."* (Micah 6:8)

### **Journeying in dignity**

"Journeying in dignity" is the theme of the 9th Edition of the International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking, celebrated around Feb. 8, 2023.

In 2022, we have experienced major changes as well as the aggravation of crises. In this context, the number of both at-risk groups and people suffering from trafficking violence has increased. This can be explained by the exploitation of vulnerabilities caused by instability due to armed conflicts, generalized violence, and climate-environmental and economic crises. Those attempting to flee in hope of safety or employment find themselves at the mercy of inadequate laws to protect migrants and find themselves more easily entangled in the webs woven by traffickers. In addition, traffickers have increased their use of information technology for recruitment and exploitation, luring victims on social media and posting false job ads on the Internet.

In this context, we are called to **keep hope and the values that guide our being and acting alive**. This is the meaning of the theme of the 9th International Day of Prayer, chosen by an international group of 10 young representatives of partner organizations<sup>i</sup> and 4 young communication experts:

- **Journeying in dignity** against human trafficking. Our commitment has as a horizon<sup>ii</sup> the dignity of every person, leaving no one behind. This is our journey.
  - Walking with open eyes to **recognize** the processes that lead millions of people, especially young people, to exploitation and human trafficking;
  - Walking with an attentive heart to **discover** the daily paths of thousands of people in search of freedom and dignity, paths of care, inclusion, and empowerment;
  - Walking with hope guiding our feet to **promote** anti-trafficking actions that make us rediscover dignity, reawaken the joy of living and release hope, letting ourselves be inspired by young people's creativity and spiritual strength;
  - Walking together hand in hand to **build** a culture of encounter that leads to the conversion of hearts and inclusive societies, capable of unmasking stereotypes and protecting the rights of every person.



## **HUMAN TRAFFICKING: A PROCESS THAT REDUCES PEOPLE TO OBJECTS FOR EXPLOITATION**

Human trafficking is the process by which people are forced or lured by false prospects, recruited, relocated, and forced to work and live in exploitative or abusive conditions. It is a complex reality, often linked to migration.

Human trafficking is thus a process that takes shape in the twists and turns of subjugation and violence, whether physical, psychological, or spiritual. People are disfigured and reduced to objects to be used and exploited for profit.

Victims of trafficking may be forced into sexual exploitation, child, early and forced marriages, or labor exploitation in various industries such as domestic, agricultural, hospitality, mining and manufacturing, construction, or fishing. Trafficking in persons may also involve organ trafficking, begging, and recruitment of children and youth for armed conflict.

Exploitation involves the restriction of personal freedom and the exercise of power over the victim through actual or threatened violence or punishment. Human trafficking deprives people of their dignity, agency in their own lives, and the right to live safely and freely.

Human trafficking is a process, during which the various elements that reduce the person to an exploitative condition gradually appear, often presenting themselves in an unexpected way. This confuses the trafficked person, who fails to recognize the exploitative condition, not realizing that the desire for life, work, and security, has been shattered by the harsh reality of human trafficking. To guide our understanding, we can read the following testimony:

*"I was working, I had a small kiosk, everything was going well. Until one day: I was looking for other better earning opportunities and I was approached by an agency that offered me a job in the Middle East. I thought I had found a unique opportunity. I left with a hopeful heart. I needed time to realize what had happened to me. They took away my documents, I was working without having rest, then I found out I wasn't getting paid, and finally, they took away my food. I was desperate, I was treated like a slave."*

Dignity and freedom are also a path; a slow and long-term journey that accompanies the person once he or she emerges from the violence of human trafficking. Let us continue to listen to our witness:

*"All I could think about was escaping from this terrible situation. During the first escape attempt, I was raped by a taxi driver whom I had asked for help."*

*Desperation made me try to escape again, fortunately, this time I found help. I was taken to the Ugandan embassy in the country I was in. After getting my documents and finding those who would take me to my home country, I left for Uganda. It was the beginning of a new life. I arrived at the airport and found two nuns, who welcomed me and took me to their home. They took care of me. They took me to the hospital several times to check on my health, gave me food, clothes, dignity... I slept a few days in a row, I remember one of the sisters came regularly to check if I was okay and brought me food.*

*The day came when I was ready to go home. I had the strength to start again, I longed to resume work in a small kiosk of my own, as I did a few years before. The nuns of Talitha Kum made this dream possible. Two years have passed, I now live in Uganda, have my own kiosk and continue to receive spiritual accompaniment and am supported to continue my healing journey and rebuild my life in dignity.”*

The 9th Edition of the International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking is an invitation to **journey with migrant populations, as pilgrims of human dignity**, pilgrims of hope, together, young people, adults and children, people of different religious traditions, different cultures and generations. Together in search of the gift that each person is, against all forms of exploitation and human trafficking. On this day, it is crucial to encourage and increase paths of education and awareness. Because “every change calls for an educational process that involves everyone. There is thus a need to create an ‘educational village’, in which all people, according to their respective roles, share the task of forming a network of open, human relationships.” (Message of Pope Francis for the launch of the Global compact on education – September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019).

We are all pilgrims on this land. We must not be afraid to “dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, [...] brothers and sisters all” (Pope Francis FT, 8).

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<sup>i</sup> The young representatives are from the following organizations: Caritas Internationalis, Focolare Movement, Talitha Kum, The Clewer Initiative, USMI Rete Anti-Tratta, and WUCWO.

<sup>ii</sup> **HUMAN DIGNITY IS THE HORIZON OF FREEDOM, JUSTICE, AND PEACE:** “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world;” (Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights December 10, 1948)