



Communique issued at the end of the conference “Church and State Working Together to Restore Dignity to Trafficked Persons” from 14th – 15th November 2016, in Abuja, Nigeria

We, representatives of Catholic and other faith based organizations from Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Central African Republic, Mozambique, the United Kingdom, The Vatican and the United States of America that are engaged in fighting against trafficking in persons, gathered in Abuja, Nigeria under the auspices of the Santa Marta Group from the 14th to 15th of November 2018, at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria to discuss effective collaboration strategies between non-governmental actors and state institutions in the fight against trafficking in persons with a focus on addressing the issues from the victim’s perspective. Having extensively discussed various dimensions and causes of human trafficking in Africa and prayerfully reflecting on the factors that fuel the scourge, and reaffirming our commitment to harness one another’s strengths, the conference made the following observations;

Modern-day slavery takes many forms, from slave labour in mines, to enforced labour on fishing boats, construction sites, agricultural fields, domestic servitude, sex slavery and the particularly heinous sexual exploitation of children and minors. This all takes place under the ruthless control of criminal gangs who stand to make huge profits at the expense of those they exploit;

That comprehensive awareness raising strategies about trafficking risks, partnership between Church and State could restore dignity to victims and facilitate prosecution of criminals in the name of the common good;

That emulating the success of existing models such as GrowEdo, Saving and Internal Loans Communities (SILC) and Social Impact Investing initiatives could provide alternatives to vulnerable youths;

That the effort of actors in the field such as Caritas organs giving training to police on ethics, religious sisters creating safe havens for victims, Muslim agencies in Northern Nigeria working to change the narrative, require multi-stakeholder support for sustainability;

That survivors of trafficking need a wide range of support from psycho-social to economic strengthening and family and community re-integration;

That the Catholic Church through the Santa Marta Group already working with state law enforcement agencies, NGOs and religious communities and the victims themselves, requires to mainstream this fight against modern day slavery in all her institutions so she becomes an effective instruments of liberation;

That the four “P”s of the Santa Marta Group which are Prevention, Protection, Partnership and Prosecution remain strategies to respond to the challenge by Pope Francis when he told the meeting of the Santa Marta Group in Rome in February 2018 : “God’s cry to Cain, found in the first pages of the Bible – ‘Where is your brother?’ – challenges us to examine seriously the various forms of complicity by which society tolerates, and encourages, particularly with regard to the sex trade, the exploitation of vulnerable men, women and children.”

Consequently the Conference pledged:

1. To bring the goal of this first conference in Africa home to our local environments, where millions of people are vulnerable to being trafficked both abroad and internally.
2. To sustain the interrogations with duty bearers : “Why are people running away from their homes?”
3. With the international focus on migration abroad, here in Nigeria and the rest of Africa we also wish to devote more attention to the exploding phenomenon of internal trafficking, from rural areas to our fast-growing cities, as well as from one African country to another.
4. By developing our strategies at this conference, in a country that is a known source of victims, we want to strengthen collaborations between the Church in Africa and the Church in Europe and other Western countries where many find themselves enslaved to help in collaborative efforts to fight the problem both at its beginning and at its end.
5. We wish to replicate Santa Marta Group structures in as many African countries as possible. We will work towards launching an effective multi-stakeholders’ team, involving law-enforcement agencies, religious institutions including other faiths and other interested NGOs and civil society organizations.
6. The conference wishes to establish a clear blueprint on how to engage with Government. Partnership with Government can and should involve caring for victims and providing financial, moral, spiritual and legal support. Helping to prosecute the perpetrators of trafficking crimes is a way of restoring dignity. Laws must be strong enough to hold people accountable and bring them to justice.

Conclusion:

Africa as a land has suffered terrible exploitation during the slave trade, suffered degradation during the colonial era and now this scourge of modern day slavery. Notwithstanding, it is to all intents and purposes a land full of joy and hope, full of people of great hospitality.

Trafficked people are victims of poverty. Poverty makes children vulnerable to traffickers. The problem will diminish as good governance improves the economy. But the conference believes that we cannot wait for that to happen. We need to act now, as a corporal work of mercy, and under our moral and civic duty to restore the dignity of trafficked persons.

The conference came about upon the initiative of the Santa Marta Group, supported by the Archbishop of Abuja and hosted by Caritas Nigeria. The participants were addressed by high level representatives of the local and universal Church: H.E John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja; Most. Rev. Augustine Akubeze, Archbishop of Benin & President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria; Most Rev. Stephen Brislin, Archbishop of Cape Town; Most Rev. Mathew Manoso Ndagoso, Episcopal Chairman of Caritas Nigeria & Archbishop of Kaduna; Most Rev. Donatus Ogun, Bishop of Uromi; Rev. Msgr. Canon James Edward Cronin, representing the President of the Santa Marta UK; Rev. Fr. Evaristus Bassey, Executive Secretary/CEO of Caritas Nigeria; Rev. Fr. Mark Odion (MSP), African Project Coordinator for the Santa Marta Group; priests and religious working in areas endemic to trafficking as well as representatives from a Muslim organization, Danjuma Abdullahi of the Ummah Support Initiative Nigeria.

Participants were also addressed by experts from national, regional and international organizations: Ambassador (Dr.) Martin Uhomoibhi, former undersecretary of the United Nations and Former Permanent Secretary of the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking In Persons (NAPTIP), United Nations Organization for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), US Homeland Security, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Catholic Relief Services, the Vatican Dicastery of Integral Human Development (Migrants Section). Among participants were representatives of the Bishops' Conferences and Caritas organizations of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Uganda, Central Africa Republic, Kenya, Rwanda, Ivory Coast, Mozambique and South Africa.

Signed: 

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On Behalf of :

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