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Interventions by the Secretary for Relations with States at the 72nd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations

Closed Ministerial-level meeting on the Central African Republic during the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly (19 September 2017)

High Level Leaders Event: A Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (19 September 2017)

The following are the interventions that the Secretary for Relations with States, H.E. Msgr. Paul R. Gallagher, gave yesterday in New York during the 72nd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Closed Ministerial-level meeting on the Central African Republic during the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly (19 September 2017)

Mr. Chairperson.

The Holy See is greatly concerned at the intensification of the conflict underway in the Central African Republic, which is causing further deaths and injuries among the civil population and aggravating the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons.

The Holy See appreciates the role of MINUSCA, as well as the extension of its mandate by the U.N., which is directed to restoring peace to the capital, Bangui, and to neutralizing, in so far as possible, the actions of armed groups, which inflict suffering on defenceless populations. However, it also wishes to see more effective action in protecting civilians, without distinction of religious creed or rank, in order to avoid partiality and to earn greater trust from the local population. Thus, the increase in the number of peacekeepers and the reorganization of their operations must have as its priority the protection of the security of all citizens and the restoration of peace. Well aware that those who are most vulnerable in the current conflict are women and children, I appeal to MINUSCA to defend their dignity as defenceless people, to guarantee their personal safety and freedom of movement, and

to protect them from armed aggression and from any abuse or humiliation that would degrade their human dignity. As Pope Francis remarked during his visit to Bangui, dignity is a “moral value, rightly synonymous with honesty, loyalty, graciousness and honour, which characterizes men and women conscious of their rights and duties, and which leads them to mutual respect” (Address to the Authorities and to the Diplomatic Corps, 29 November 2015).

The International Community is called to give every necessary support for the democratic and inclusive development of those structures that will permit the growth of the country. Of course, it is the national Government’s duty to guarantee the rule of law, to curb and combat corruption, which saps the trust of citizens, and to ensure access to health care and education for citizens of every level, without discrimination. But this in turn requires the coordinated action of the International Community, so that the financial aid promised during the Brussels Conference of last autumn is made available, giving an injection of resources to the country and facilitating its reconstruction as well as its financial recovery.

In any country, a healthy dynamic between the various political forces can be achieved only through sincere dialogue. With the help of the International Community, such a dialogue must become the privileged path to arrive at peace and to give to the Central African Republic the necessary stability for its social, economic and political renewal. Indeed, dialogue is the only solution to any armed conflict and the only way to silence the weapons of war and to give life to words of reconciliation. We might recall here the positive outcome of the pastoral visit of Pope Francis (29-30 November 2015), which gave rise to strong and clear gestures of cooperation, promoted also by the heads of the other religious confessions. Recently, the Holy Father made an appeal to all sectors of the Central African Republic: “may weapons be silenced and may the good will to dialogue prevail so as to give the country peace and development” (Pope Francis, Angelus 21 May 2017).

To reach a fruitful outcome, that process of dialogue must provide for:

- a ceasefire between all the parties to the conflict;
- the right means for disarming the various armed groups, while studying how best to reinsert their members into the civil and democratic community;
- justice for the victims of heinous attacks on the unarmed population;
- and the guaranteed return of migrants and refugees, both Christian and Muslim, who should be able to take possession of their property and return to a serene and tranquil life.

In this effort of inclusive dialogue, the Catholic Church’s commitment will not be lacking. Together with other religious confessions, the Church will seek what unites, while rejecting that which causes division or contention, since the search for peace comes before every other good.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

High Level Leaders Event: A Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (19 September 2017)

Mme Prime Minister, Excellencies,

The Holy See’s involvement in the fight against human trafficking and other forms of modern slavery is not new. Already in 1965, the Catholic Church strongly condemned as “infamies” slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, and disgraceful working conditions where people are treated as instruments of gain rather

than free and responsible persons.¹ These phenomena “poison human society, debase their perpetrators” and represent “a supreme dishonour to the Creator.”

The issue of trafficking in persons can only be fully addressed by promoting effective juridical instruments and concrete collaboration at multiple levels by all stakeholders, using multi-pronged strategies aimed to halt these heinous crimes, punish the criminals and assist victims.

Pope Francis has made it clear that working to end forced labour, modern slavery and trafficking in persons is one of the defining priorities of his papacy. In this way, the institutions and organizations of the Catholic Church act in partnerships and collaboration with both the public and private sectors, including with government authorities.

In particular, the Holy See and the Catholic Church collaborate with the British Government at various levels and in many initiatives in the effort to eradicate trafficking in persons. One such partnership is the Santa Marta Group, whose effectiveness lies in the close collaboration between law enforcement authorities and Church institutions, which rescue victims and accompany them in their rehabilitation to normal life. Experience has shown that many victims are wary of trusting law enforcement authorities, but that they confide their stories more easily to religious personnel, especially religious sisters, who can build their trust in the legal process and provide them safe haven and other forms of assistance.

Thus, faithful to their specific nature, Catholic institutions and organizations have been on the front line in helping the victims, especially women and girls, to escape from situations of slavery and, with loving concern, patiently walk with them on the long road back to a life of freedom, both interior and exterior. Women religious, in particular, have been central to this work that often takes place in situations dominated by violence. They form networks at multiple levels to coordinate their efforts and share best practices and resources, thus maximizing their impact.

Mme Prime Minister, Excellencies,

The Political Declaration on the Implementation of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, which will be adopted in the coming days, emphasizes “in the strongest terms possible the importance of strengthening collective action ...to end trafficking in persons.”² The global nature of the crimes of forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking require from all of us a commensurate response of collaboration, fraternity and solidarity. We owe that response to the tens of millions of victims, who look to us with desperate hope for their emancipation and for a return to a life of dignity and freedom.

Thank you, Mme Prime Minister; thank you, Your Excellencies.

1 Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes* 27.

2 Political Declaration on the Implementation of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, paragraph 24.
