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SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

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Video Message of the Holy Father for the Ninth International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking

The following is the video message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the online Prayer Marathon, taking place on the occasion of the Ninth International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking, held today, Wednesday 8 February, on the theme “Journeying in Dignity”:

Video Message of the Holy Father

Today we remember Saint Bakhita, patroness of victims of human trafficking. I join with you in celebrating the ninth International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking, on the theme *Journeying in dignity*, which involves young people as protagonists.

I address you, young people, in a special way: I encourage you to care for dignity, yours and of every person you meet. I know it was you who chose this theme: “Journeying in dignity”. It is very important: it indicates a broad horizon for your commitment against human trafficking: human dignity. In this way you can contribute to keeping hope alive, and I would also add joy, which I invite you to preserve in your hearts, along with the Word of God, because the true joy is Christ!

Human trafficking disfigures dignity. Exploitation and subjugation limit freedom and turn people into objects to use and discard. And the system of trafficking profits from the injustice and wickedness the oblige millions of people to live in conditions of vulnerability. Indeed, people impoverished by the economic crisis, wars, climate change and many forms of instability are easily recruited. Unfortunately, trafficking is growing to a worrying extent, affecting primarily migrants, women and children, young people like you, people full of dreams and the desire to live in dignity.

We live in a difficult time, but it is precisely in this reality that all of us, in particular young people, are required to join forces to build networks of good, to spread the light that comes from Christ and his Gospel. The light that will be symbolically handed over in these days to the young people who have come to Rome to represent the

organizations that have for years collaborated for this Day of Prayer and Awareness against trafficking. With this gesture you are sent forth, as missionaries of human dignity, against human trafficking and every form of exploitation. This inaugurates a special year of involvement of young people, until the next Day in 2024. Guard this light and be a blessing for other young people. Never tire of seeking pathways for transforming our societies and preventing the shameful scourge that is human trafficking.

Journeying for dignity, against human trafficking, without leaving anyone behind. I would like to repeat some of the beautiful expressions you have written: "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. Walking *with hope guiding our feet* to promote anti-trafficking actions. 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".

I hope that many people will accept your invitation to walk together against trafficking: walking together with those who are destroyed by the violence of sexual and labour exploitation; to walk together with migrants, displaced persons, those who are searching for a place to live in peace and family. Together with you, young people, to reaffirm courageously the value of human dignity.

I thank you and say to you: go forward with courage! Go forward with courage! May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady protect you. May Saint Bakhita pray with us and for us. I heartily bless all of you who work against trafficking and every person you meet on this journey for dignity. Thank you!
