

Welcome at AI and Human Trafficking conference

Bishop William Kenney

Welcome all and thank you for coming. My name is Bishop William Kenney and I represent the Santa Marta Group. A particular thank you to our host MEP Javier Zarzalejos and to Fr Manuel Prieto and the COMECE team for co-organising this conference.

The Santa Marta Group first met in 2014 when over 25 police chiefs and Catholic bishops from around the world, in the presence of Pope Francis, to sign an historic declaration committing themselves to eliminate human trafficking. Named after Pope Francis' residence, where delegates stayed for the first conference, the Santa Marta Group works across the world to address the terrible crime that human trafficking is for victims and wider society.

For the Catholic Church, the eradication of modern slavery and the pastoral care of victims is a priority. The Santa Marta Group was developed in response; born of the conviction that bringing decision makers together, building partnerships and co-operation between law enforcement and the Church, brings huge benefits in fighting this crime and caring for its victims. When the former head of the Metropolitan Police (the largest police force in the UK) was challenged by a journalist on why the police was working with the Church, he said: "Human trafficking is a global criminal network of evil and to combat it seriously we need a global network of good. That is where the Catholic Church comes in."

There are already many impressive and dedicated efforts to tackle human trafficking, including NGOs and especially Religious Sisters who have cared for victims of slavery for decades. However, the role of the Santa Marta Group is unique. Its guiding principle is to bring together decision-makers and leaders from the Catholic Church, governments, supranational bodies, law enforcement agencies and Civil society to create partnerships to eradicate modern slavery. Identifying the right leaders, building trust between decision-makers and encouraging co-operation and good practice by acting as a catalyst for action is the Santa Marta Group's task.

With up to 50 million victims, generating criminal profits of \$235bn every year the challenge is significant and multi-faceted. The task is not only to tackle supply, but also to stop demand, cleanse supply chains and break up often sophisticated criminal groups who profit from this terrible trade in human beings, where the vulnerable victims are coldly treated as commodities to be used over and over again. This requires clear-sighted and focused energy from bodies such as the European Union and major resourcing from individual States. It is notable that less than \$1bn is spent by governments across the world to fight human trafficking even though it is the second most lucrative global crime. Clearly, more resource is required to fight this evil scourge.

In addition to enforcing existing legislation, we also must develop measures that recognise that human trafficking is becoming an increasingly tech-enabled crime recruiting, manipulating, and profiting from victims. AI tools also offer opportunities to detect patterns, disrupt trafficking networks, and rescue victims.

It is notable that upon his election, Pope Leo XIV identified AI as a priority. In a message sent on July 10 to the participants of the AI for Good Summit in Geneva, Pope Leo XIV encouraged nations to establish frameworks and regulations on AI so that it can be developed and used according to the common good,

“I would like to encourage you to seek ethical clarity and to establish a coordinated local and global governance of AI, based on the shared recognition of the inherent dignity and fundamental freedoms of the human person.

“As AI becomes capable of adapting autonomously to many situations by making purely technical algorithmic choices, it is crucial to consider its anthropological and ethical implications, the values at stake and the duties and regulatory frameworks required to uphold those values”, the Pope underlined in his message.

He emphasized that the “responsibility for the ethical use of AI systems begins with those who develop, manage and oversee them... AI requires proper ethical management and regulatory frameworks centred on the human person, and which goes beyond the mere criteria of utility or efficiency.”

Pope Leo highlighted that this should be the common goal and thus AI should foster “peaceful and just societies in the service of integral human development and the good of the human family”.

I look forward this afternoon to our deliberations on how this can best be achieved and I thank you again for your consideration and attention.

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