



Vatican City , 13-17 September 2015

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Pastoral Care of the Road/Street

PLAN OF ACTION

in response to the phenomenon
of children, women earning a living or
living on roads and streets,
and their families

in the light of Teachings of POPE FRANCIS

and the conclusions of 8 international / continental meetings
organized by PCPCMIP since 2003

FINAL DOCUMENT

Plan of Action

EVENT

WE, the participants of the International Symposium on the Pastoral Care of the Road/Street, coming from 42 countries, representing all continents in the world: America, Europe, The Middle East, Africa, Asia and the Oceania, and from 12 Catholic institutions and religious congregations; organized by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, with the support of donor institutions, held in the Vatican City, on 13th-17th September 2015, on the theme: **PLAN OF ACTION** in response to the phenomenon of children and women who are compelled by various factors to earn a living or to live on roads and streets and their families; studied in the light of the Teachings of POPE FRANCIS and the conclusions of previous 8 international and continental meetings organized by PCPCMIP since 2003; enlightened by the continental presentations on the concerned phenomenon which is treated in the *Guidelines on the Pastoral Care of the Road* issued by PCPCMIP on 24th May 2007, and the conferences on family and human trafficking; also taking into consideration the VIII World Meeting of Families [USA, September 2015], the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Family [Vatican, October 2015] and the Jubilee Year of Mercy [December 2015-2016]:

with filial devotion and obedience, humbly present to our beloved Holy Father, POPE FRANCIS, the following reflections and recommendations for his kind consideration:

REFELCTIONS

WE, INSPIRED BY THE WORD OF GOD which manifests God's preferential love for the poor: "Let the weak and the orphan have justice, be fair to the wretched and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy, save them from the clutches of the wicked" [Psalm 82: 3-4], and "The oppressed and needy search for water, and there is none, their tongue is parched with thirst. I, Yahweh, shall answer them. I, the God of Israel, shall not abandon them" [Isaiah 41:

17]; which lays down the path of salvation according to the Gospel of Matthew: “For I was hungry, you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me... [Mt 25:35 ff]; and which thus reminds us of our vocation in the context of the pastoral care of the road: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord” [Luke 4:18-19; cf. Isaiah 61];

GUIDED BY THE TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH: which states that “there is a growing awareness of the exalted dignity proper to the human person, since he stands above all things, and his rights and duties are universal and inviolable. Therefore, there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter...the right to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect...” [Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n° 26] and as taught by Pope John Paul II that the dignity of the human person was definitively restored to him by the redemption that took place through the cross, giving him back meaning to his life and existence in the world [cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 1999, n° 2; cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 1979, n° 10];

ALSO DESIRING TO GIVE A RENEWED VOICE TO THE VOICE OF THE SYNODAL FATHERS WHO RECOGNIZE:

in *Ecclesia in Africa* in 1995 that, despite positive developments, the Church has to deplore and condemn all customs and practices still found in some African societies, which deprive women of their rights and the respect due to them, while the Church seeks to contribute to humanity’s conversion, leading it to acceptance of God’s salvific plan through her witness to the Gospel, accompanied by charitable work on behalf of the poor and the neediest [cf. n° 121, n° 139] and in *Africae munus* in 2011 that there are number of areas to be still addressed with stronger and more coordinated efforts in the mission of the Church in Africa and Madagascar such as the question of woman’s dignity and rights as well as her contribution to the family and to the society, which remain far from being fully recognized, the situation of fewer opportunities being offered to women and girls than to men and boys, and the existence of harmful ancestral traditions and cultural practices debasing and degrading the dignity of women and children as well as various forms of serious maltreatments being committed against children [cf. n° 56; n° 67];

in *Ecclesia in America* in 1999 that the Church in America must incarnate in her pastoral initiatives the solidarity of the universal Church towards the poor and the outcast of every kind; that her attitude needs to be one of assistance, promotion, liberation and fraternal openness and the goal of the Church is to ensure that no one is marginalized [cf. n° 58] and in *Ecclesia in Asia*, of the same year, that the phenomenon of urbanization and the emergence of huge urban conglomerations often become the fertile terrain for crimes, terrorism, prostitution, and exploitation of the weaker sectors of society; and tourism, even though a legitimate industry with its own cultural and educational values, has in some cases a devastating influence upon the moral and physical landscape of many Asian countries, manifested in the degradation of young women and even children through prostitution [cf. n° 7];

in *Ecclesia in Oceania* in 2002 that the social apostolate is as an integral part of the evangelizing mission of the Church to speak a word of hope to the world and to contribute to human development, to promotion of human rights, defence of human life and dignity, social justice and protection of the environment, determined to act against injustices, corruption,

threats to life and new forms of poverty [cf. n° 26, n° 32] and in *Ecclesia in Europa* in 2003 that the whole Church is being called to *give new hope to the poor* and that in the Church, to welcome and serve the poor means to welcome and serve Christ (cf. *Mt 25:40*) and that *Preferential love for the poor* is a necessary dimension of Christian existence and service to the Gospel. Therefore, to love the poor, and to testify that they are especially loved by God, means acknowledging that persons have value in themselves, apart from their economic, cultural, and social status [cf. n° 86],

in *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* in 2012 that the region, even though traversed by Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Saints, Fathers of the Church and being the crucible of the earliest dogmatic formulations, rich in diversity, but is all too frequently restrictive and even violent, thus affecting all the inhabitants of the region and every aspect of their lives, forcing them to tragically experience human upheavals. This situation demands that the proclamation of the Gospel must always be accompanied by works of charity, responding to the immediate needs of all, regardless of their religion, factions or ideologies, for the sole purpose of making present on earth God's love for humanity, aiming at promoting values of human life, justice and peace for the good of the people and the region [cf. n° 8, n° 89, n° 31].

AND IMMENSELY TOUCHED AND INSPIRED BY THE REINVIGORATED PASTORAL VISION OF POPE FRANCIS WHO TEACHES US THAT:

The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. The option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. It is essential, therefore, to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability such as the reality of women who particularly endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence because of their frequently less ability to defend their rights [cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24th November 2013, n° 1, n° 198, n° 212].

The human trafficking has become today an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ. It is a crime against humanity [cf. *Address to the participants of the International Conference on combatting human trafficking*, 10th April 2014]. The physical, economic, sexual and psychological exploitation of men and women, boys and girls, currently holds tens of millions in inhumane and humiliating bondage. Every human being - man, woman, boy and girl - is the image of God. Despite great efforts of many, this modern slavery continues to be an atrocious scourge that is present throughout the world on a broad scale, even as tourism. This crime of "lèse-humanity" masquerades behind seemingly acceptable customs, but in reality claims its victims through prostitution, human trafficking, forced labour, slave labour, mutilation, the sale of organs, the consumption of drugs and child labour. It hides behind closed doors, in particular places, in the streets, automobiles, factories, the countryside, in fishing boats and many other places [cf. *Address on the occasion of the signing of the Faith leaders' Declaration against slavery*, 2 December 2014];

From the first moments of their lives, many children are rejected, abandoned, and robbed of their childhood and future. Their hunger, their poverty, their vulnerability, their abandonment, their ignorance or their helplessness, should these be the very reason for us to love them all the more, with a big heart and greater generosity. Every child who is marginalized, abandoned, who lives on the street begging with every kind of trick, without schooling, without medical care, *is a cry that rises up to God* and denounces the system that we adults have set in place. And unfortunately these children are prey to criminals who exploit them for shameful trafficking or commerce, or train them for war and violence. [cf. *General Audience*, Wednesday, 8th April 2015]. Even the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet. Today a true ecological approach always becomes a social

approach. It must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*. Greater attention must be given to the needs of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable, in debates often dominated by the powerful and by more powerful interests [cf. *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si*, 24th May 2015, n° 48, n°49, n°52]

Hence the core of the vocation to service is to embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important, those whom Matthew lists in the final judgment on love: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison (cf. *Mt 25:31-46*). [cf. *Homily of the Inauguration of Petrine Ministry*, 19th March 2013]. All are encouraged, therefore, to work to help men and women, and children who are enslaved, exploited, abused as instruments of work or pleasure, who are often tortured and sadly mutilated. The governments and civil authorities are urged to work decisively to remove the causes of this disgraceful scourge, unworthy of our society today [cf. *Angelus*, 8 February 2015]. The law enforcement authorities are primarily responsible for combating this tragic reality by a vigorous application of the law. The humanitarian and social workers, on the other hand, are called to work, in collaboration with law enforcement authorities, to provide victims with welcome, human warmth and the possibility of building a new life. [cf. *Address to the participants of the International Conference on combatting human trafficking*, 10th April 2014];

BEING ABLE TO WITNESS BY OUR OWN SELF IN CONCRETE SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF THE MISSIONS WE ARE ENGAGED IN:

That poverty, uncontrolled urbanization and globalization, wars, social unrests and conflicts, psychological, physical and sexual abuse in family and in society, domestic abuse and violence, family breaks-down, competitive professional demands, lack of opportunities, human trafficking which include trafficking of human organs and child soldiers, harmful cultural and ethnic practices, male-domination, terrorism, psychological disturbances are seen as major factors driving children and women to earn a living or to live on roads and streets;

ACTION

SINCE THE SITUATION IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY ALARMING AND IN OBEDIENCE TO THE WORDS OF POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESSED TO US ON THURSDAY, 17TH SEPTEMBER 2015:

that he has great admiration for our mission of protecting and promoting the dignity of these children and women, and therefore, he encourages us to continue the same mission with faith and apostolic zeal; that he asks us not to surrender in the face of difficulties and challenges which question our conviction, nourished by faith in Christ who has demonstrated unto death on the cross the preferential love of God the Father towards the weakest and the most marginalized; that the **CHURCH, THEREFORE, CANNOT REMAIN SILENT** and the **ECCLESIAL INSTITUTIONS CANNOT CLOSE THEIR EYES** in front of this sad phenomenon of children and women earning a living or living on roads and streets; that it is important to involve diverse expressions of the Christian community in various countries in order to remove the causes which force a child or a woman to live on streets or to procure a living on roads; that we can never avoid bringing the goodness and the tenderness of God the Merciful Father to all, in particular, to the weakest and the most disadvantaged and the mercy is the supreme act by which God comes to meet us, and it is the path which opens the heart towards the hope of being always loved:

WE UNANIMOUSLY AND CONVINCINGLY STATE AS OUR PROPOSED PLAN OF ACTION, TO BE MADE KNOWN TO ALL EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES, BISHOPS, RELIGIOUS CONFERENCES, MAJOR RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS, PARISH PRIESTS, SEMINARY RECTORS AND RELIGIOUS FORMATORS, CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, ACADEMIES AND UNIVERSITIES, CATHOLIC CHARITY AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS AS WELL AS GOVERNMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS [NGOS] THAT:

WE FIRMLY URGE ALL :

1. To uphold the dignity and rights of every human person, regardless of one's social, cultural, religious, political, ethnic or professional background, created to the *image and likeness of God* [cf. Genesis 1:26], as proclaimed in the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church [cf. Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum novarum*, 15th May 1891; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church*, 2nd April 2004] and the Catechism of the Catholic Church [cf. n° 1928-1933; n°2258; n°2297].

WE MORALLY REJECT AND OPPOSE TO:

2. All forms of human trafficking and physical, psychological and sexual violence and abuse, inflicted upon children and women, forcing them to lead a life not worthy of human dignity, which generate devastating negative impact on the person concerned and on the life of his/her family as well as on society at large,
3. All forms of laws and acts favouring prostitution which is a reality that dishonours and degrades the dignity of the life of women and men, fearing that such legal recognition may further encourage criminal activities enslaving innocent children, women and men through sexual and labour exploitation [cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n° 2355].

WE RESOLUTELY CALL UPON THE STATES/GOVERNMENTS:

4. To protect with all legal measures children and women earning a living or living on roads and streets, who are often victims of socio-economic inconsistencies and/or human trafficking, ensuring all necessary sustenance to institutions and procedures of their liberation, rehabilitation, reunification and re-integration into their natural families, healthy family contexts, educational and formation institutions and fitting workforce;
5. To employ all resources, both material and institutional at disposal of States and Governments, to remove all causes of such phenomenon of children and women earning a living or living on roads and streets; and to enforce or to enact necessary legal structures and laws in order to bring to justice all those who promote, facilitate, organize or make use of all forms of sexual and labour exploitation of such children and women, or maintain structures and institutions for the same purpose,
6. To guarantee to children, women and their families earning a living or living on roads and streets the *universal right* to identity registration/identity cards and other legal documentation common to all individuals and to ensure their inclusion as beneficiaries of integral and inclusive programmes of development, education, health-care and housing in international projects, in national/regional/city budgets as well as in protection policies and services.

WE STRONGLY URGE THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES, BISHOPS AND MAJOR RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS:

7. To write a *special pastoral letter* at National, Diocesan or Congregation level, in the context of the forthcoming XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Family, proposing conferences, discussions, moments of prayers [Catholic, Ecumenical/Inter-religious] on the life of the family of children and women earning a living or living on roads and streets, reassuring to them the promotion of social justice and considering them not as strangers or simply as beneficiaries of charity but as ordinary parishioners and citizens with every right and dignity;
8. To guarantee the establishment of a special-task desk/force at national/local levels in order to promote, coordinate and implement all that is necessary to reduce the risk and incidences of abuse and exploitation of children and women, and to liberate and reintegrate them, as well as to take every necessary step to collaborate with legal and civil authorities to bring to justice all perpetrators and offenders implicated in all forms of violence and exploitation against children and women;
9. To include compulsive study-material on the phenomenon of human trafficking in all its forms, in particular sexual and labour exploitation, especially related to children and women earning a living or living on roads and streets, in the curriculum of seminary and religious formation, in the catechesis and in all Catholic education institutions such as schools, colleges and universities, and in the formation of staff of charity and development organizations.
10. To promote national and international advocacy and lobbying against all forms of sexual and labour exploitation, violence against children and women, prostitution, and in favour of human rights and social benefits of such victimized and marginalized, through the participation of qualified laity and people of good will.

WE AS PARTICIPANTS UNDERSTAKE:

11. To promote our recommendations, numbering from 1-10, and to implement, in the same spirit, in collaboration with national and diocesan organizations and other institutions with the same mission towards children and women earning a living or living on roads and streets, through organized events, research work, mass-media, networking, the recommendations we ourselves have proposed during the previous 8 International and Continental Meetings on the Pastoral Care of Road, held since 2003;
12. To readily share our experience and knowledge on the concerned phenomenon, and willingly extend our good practices of welcome, counselling, immediate support to all children and women who earn a living or live on roads and streets, in order to liberate themselves from all forms of exploitation or debasing means of living and to lead a life worthy of human dignity, while strongly urging perpetrators, offenders, clients, to abandon all forms of exploitation and violence and to enter into their own phase of rehabilitation.

Vatican City, 1st October 2015