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8 February: First International Day of Prayer against Human Trafficking

Vatican City, 3 February 2015 (VIS) -The Holy See Press Office announced the first International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking. The Day will be held on 8 February, the feast day of Sudanese slave St. Josephine Bakhita who, after being freed, became a Canossian Sister and was canonized in 2000, and will be entitled: "*A light against human trafficking*". The Day is promoted by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, the Pontifical Council "Justice and Peace" and the International Union of Superiors General (UISG).

The conference was attended by Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life; Cardinal Antonio Maria Veglio, president of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples; and Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council "Justice and Peace". The other speakers were Sister Carmen Sammut, MSOLA, president of the International Union of Superiors General; Sister Gabriella Bottani, SMC, coordinator of Talitha Kum (the International Network of Consecrated Life against Trafficking in Persons); Sister Valeria Gandini, SMC; and Sister Imelda Poole IBVM, coordinator of the European Talitha Kum network.

Cardinal Turkson, speaking in English, reiterated that "millions of people today – children, women and men of all ages – are deprived of freedom and are forced to live in conditions akin to slavery. For those who cry out – usually in silence – for liberation, St Josephine Bakhita is an exemplary witness of hope. We, victims and advocates alike, could do no better than be inspired by her life and entrust our efforts to her intercession."

He continued, "the Holy Father invites us all to recognize that we are facing a global phenomenon which exceeds the competence of any one community or country. In order to eliminate it, we need a mobilization comparable in size to that of the phenomenon itself." The prelate explained that the International Day against Human Trafficking constitutes "a mobilization of awareness and prayer on a global scale. Our awareness must expand and extend to the very depths of this evil and its farthest reaches ... from awareness to prayer ... from prayer to solidarity ... and from solidarity to concerted action, until slavery and trafficking are no more."

On the occasion of this first day of prayer and reflection, all dioceses, parishes, associations, families and individuals are invited to reflect and pray in order to cast light on this crime, as indicated by the theme of the initiative. In addition, prayer vigils will be held in different countries, culminating in the Angelus prayer in St. Peter's Square on 8 February.

On the day, the faithful are invited to recite the following prayer: "O God, when we hear of children and adults deceived and taken to unknown places for purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labor, and organ 'harvesting', our hearts are saddened and our spirits angry that their dignity and rights are ignored through threats, lies, and force. We cry out against the evil practice of this modern slavery, and pray with St. Bakhita for it to end. Give us wisdom and courage to reach out and stand with those whose bodies, hearts and spirits have been so wounded, so that together we may make real your promises to fill these sisters and brothers with a love that is tender and good. Send the exploiters away empty-handed to be converted from this wickedness, and help us all to claim the freedom that is your gift to your children. Amen."