



# PROCLAIMING LIBERTY TO CAPTIVES

## Statement on human trafficking from the Catholic Bishops of Maryland

**April 3, 2017** - The evil of human trafficking is an international, national and local scourge, and a grave violation of the dignity and freedom of all its victims. Human trafficking includes both labor and sex trafficking, and rivals the global drug industry in its scope and profits, affecting the lives of countless victims from all over the world. The U.S. State Department estimates that an alarming 600,000 to 800,000 victims annually are trafficked across nations' borders worldwide, with 14,500 to 17,500 people trafficked into the United States each year.

Sadly, Maryland is not immune from this tragic reality. Our state is a prime location for local, national, and international trafficking due to the Interstate 95 corridor that connects multiple major cities in the region, the number of truck and rest stops along highways, and the ease of travel that the Baltimore Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport allows to and from the state. In 2014, the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force's Victims Services Committee identified and provided services to 396 survivors of human trafficking.

As people of faith, this grave injustice cries out for a response. Yet perhaps the most distressing aspect of human trafficking is the cloak of silence gripping its victims. Human trafficking preys upon the vulnerable, such as those seeking to escape poverty and violence, runaways, and those who are hindered by language barriers and ignorance of the law. Often victims are not even aware they are being exploited. The Gospel calls us to break this yoke of modern-day slavery by raising awareness about the scope of this problem and doing all that we can as Catholics to recognize, set free, embrace and empower our brothers and sisters who are victims of human trafficking.

A significant amount of work is already being done by multiple entities to rescue and meet the needs of victims of trafficking, to dismantle trafficking networks, to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions, and to write laws to protect victims and prevent others from becoming victims. The Catholic bishops in Maryland pledge to devote the resources of the Church to support, unify, and expand these efforts wherever possible. As a first

step, we call upon our parishes, schools, social service agencies, hospitals, universities, and other institutions to initiate a comprehensive awareness campaign about human trafficking.

To assist in those efforts, the Catholic Church will sponsor regional trainings throughout the state beginning in the spring of 2017, at which we will bring together national, state, and local experts who will provide participants with effective tools for combating human trafficking in our local communities. We urge Catholics in Maryland to take advantage of these trainings in order to help shine a light on this issue.

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***As individuals, we may feel that the enormity of this crime against humanity cannot be eradicated by our own small efforts, yet even one life rescued due to our increased ability to recognize and assist a victim of trafficking is of utmost importance.***

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Our commitment to addressing this issue reflects the commitment of the world-wide Church and especially Pope Francis, who from the start of his papacy has spoken passionately about this "plague on the body of contemporary humanity." We join in his call to open our eyes to those who are suffering in our midst:

*"I urgently appeal to all men and women of good will, and all those near or far, including the highest levels of civil institutions, who witness the scourge of contemporary slavery, not to become accomplices to this evil, not to turn away from the sufferings of our brothers and sisters, our fellow human beings, who are deprived of their freedom and dignity. Instead, may we have the courage to touch the suffering flesh of Christ, revealed in the faces of those countless persons whom he calls 'the least of these my brethren.'" (Mt 25:40, 45). - Message for the 2015 World Day of Peace.*



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