

### **Summary of the Conference by Fr Mark Odion.**

Having delivered his famous abolition speech in the British House of Common on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 1789, Sir William Wilberforce concluded by saying "...having heard all of this you may choose to look the other way, but you can never again say that you did not know". We have heard so many speakers addressing us during the past two days. These speakers, basically, addressed the topical issue of human trafficking from different angles emphasizing the seriousness of the crime that is caused by the abuse of traditional cultural values, the commodification of the human person, corruption; and resulting in many of the people of God living in abject poverty. The speakers also invited us, as a Church, to do something to help our sisters and brothers entangled in the web of the crime of human trafficking.

The option for the poor is not just an option for each poor individual that we find on the roadside. Rather, it is an option that is both structural - involving socio-economic change - and structuring - demanding a change in our way of thinking. It is an option that undertakes the defence of our world for the sake of those most vulnerable to and most affected by its destruction. It is an option founded on the principle that: "people in every nation can enhance the social dimension of their lives by acting as committed and responsible citizens, not as a mob swayed by the powers that be" (EG no 220).

In his apostolic exhortation on the proclamation of the gospel in today's world, (Evangelii Gaudium), Pope Francis referring to Mark 6: 37: "You yourselves give them something to eat", invites the Church and the State to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor (EG no 188). This is necessary because as the Holy Father noted like Mary, the heart of the Church is pierced with the sword of organised crime when her children are being trafficked (EG no 286).

Working together to help those caught in the net of human trafficking should be our goal as stressed by all the speakers during the conference. Some of the speakers, however, highlighted the fact that in order to work together, there are needs to seek financial assistance from sponsoring bodies. In as much as we look towards the big financial organisations and countries for support, we should bear in mind that "*he who pays the piper dictates the tune*". Our first aim, therefore, should be to look inward for the possibility to generate our own fund.

Another member of the British Parliament Edmund Burke once said, "*the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing*". As a Church, we are invited to continue to work together to help those who have been abused, accompanying them to regain their confidence and restore their dignity and human right. In fulfilling this, we are responding to the pastoral strategy of the Holy Father expressed in Evangelii Gaudium no 171: *accompany the victims of human trafficking is protecting the sheep from the wolves of traffickers and organised crime*. The process of accompanying the victims includes listening with compassion, understanding with the wisdom of the Church and, encouraging victims and pastoral agent patiently. We MUST, therefore, do something to eliminate the evil of human trafficking from our society by becoming the little Santa Marta in our communities.