

**Sovereign Order of Malta  
Tuesday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**How to better fight, together, the sexual trafficking of women in West Africa  
and to support their rehabilitation?**

**Paris, France  
At the Headquarters of the “Institut Français des Relations Internationales” (IFRI)**

Synthesis by **Michel Veuthey**

Ambassador of the Ambassador of the Sovereign Order of Malta to combat trafficking in human beings

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

First of all, **thank you** to all the speakers and participants, and to the moderator, Geneviève Colas.

**The Order of Malta**, as its Grand Chancellor Albrecht v. Boeselager reminded us at the outset, is active against trafficking in human beings in many areas, both operational and diplomatic.

And we certainly have **much to learn** from other actors, both governmental and civil society, starting with the victims themselves and the organizations - religious or not - that assist victims, trapped, deceived, magically practiced, raped and abused, both physical and psychological.

During this very dense morning, very rich in testimonies and perspectives, we were able to take stock, **become aware** of and be confronted with the scale of the **tragedy** of trafficking in human beings - in human beings considered as objects, exchange products, commodities - and other forms of contemporary slavery, particularly in Africa and Europe, in the face of the power of national and transnational criminal trafficking networks, and the millions, if not billions, of **blood money** generated by these trafficking.

Several speakers stressed the need to increase **collaboration**, conclude cooperation agreements, establish partnerships to prevent, protect and rehabilitate, enable victims to leave prostitution, regularize their stay in France, not to mention the **obligation** of all States to coordinate their police forces, cooperate between jurisdictions to prosecute the various forms of trafficking and provide victims with the means to obtain **compensation** for the damage they have been subjected to.

These exchanges between actors from new horizons should contribute to the development and **strengthening** of solutions, mutual assistance and cooperation for States and civil society with a view to broad **mobilization** and a shared effort to stem the rise of this scourge and to consider the **abolition** of slavery at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Governmental bodies, international organizations, starting with IOM and UNODC, and regional organizations - in particular the European Union and the Council of Europe - and subregional organizations, such as ECOWAS, civil society organizations, humanitarian and human rights NGOs, the private sector, local communities and diasporas, the media - starting with radio and television, as well as film producers - and of course research, analysis and training institutes, schools, are all called upon to **contribute to this struggle**.

The contribution of **individual personalities**, particularly in Nigeria in Edo State, where the situation is worrying, was noted.

The testimony of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Louis in Lagos reminded us of the unique role that **spiritual leaders** and **faith-based organizations** play in the countries of origin, transit and destination of trafficked persons in raising awareness and helping to mobilize all actors.

It is not only the international treaties that must be applied and implemented, in particular **the Palermo Protocol of 2000**, to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime And **the Council of Europe Convention of 2005** on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and **National Legislation**, but also the **universal values of humanity and solidarity, respect for the life and dignity of the person**, that will guide us to achieve this objective.

It is a vast effort of **information and training** - starting with the training of professionals who may have to deal with trafficking - that we must undertake at all levels to adapt our **efforts** to the growing and changing needs of victims and their families and entourage, to change attitudes in affected communities, to restore free thinking to victims, to help them develop economically, to stop the impunity of traffickers, to remove these women from moral judgment, the stigma of prostitution, and racism. And to reverse the **burden of shame**, from women to clients of prostitution, although this penalisation of clients is not unanimously accepted, even if women - who will be against it - must be respected in their dignity, regardless of their race, nationality or social status.

It is a long-term struggle, across borders, requiring a **multidimensional mobilization of human, financial and economic resources** as well as collaboration between public and private actors, between different Governments, starting with France and Nigeria, between different Ministries, between private foundations and civil society organizations, between lawyers, judges, doctors, psychologists and religious leaders. An **interdisciplinary** approach is needed, involving different actors to understand the problem, to adapt to local conditions, to identify victims, protect them, take care of them, allow them to leave the networks, protect them, take the time to help them rebuild themselves medically, psychologically and professionally, to reintegrate into host communities or communities of origin, to protect them permanently, in particular in professional reintegration programmes, to encourage them to be independent, to give them back a sense of dignity, children of God, to be able to support themselves and their families, and to prevent them from falling back into the **traps of slavery**. And to do this, it is necessary to rebuild trust within local and national communities.

And now, "**res non verba**", let's move from words to action.

And, for this reason, the concluding message of the **Order of Malta's Grand Hospitaller, Dominique de La Rochefoucauld-Montbel**, should open up some perspectives.

Thank you again to all of you for this **very lively morning** of exchanges.