



**SOVEREIGN HOSPITALLER ORDER
OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM OF RHODES AND OF MALTA
AMBASSADOR TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS**

*Conference “Initiatives for Protecting the Youth from Extremist and Violent Ideologies:
Implementation Measures”
Under the Patronage of The Muslim World League in Geneva*

“Human Trafficking and Violent Religious Extremism”

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Excellencies, Dear Friends,

Thank you for inviting me to speak today at this very important meeting dealing with burning issues of our time.

We unfortunately have to acknowledge that violent religious extremism happened in history and still is happening today in many parts of the world. How can we deal with it? I shall focus on, and limit my intervention to, the link between violent religious extremism and human trafficking.

This link between religious extremism and human trafficking has existed throughout history and still exists today. What can we do against human trafficking, a form of contemporary slavery, in words and in deeds?

In deeds, I would like to mention **two concrete examples of ongoing inter-religious efforts** to curb, limit human trafficking through religious extremists:

1. The first in Northern **Nigeria**, which was the subject of a movie entitled [“The Imam and the Pastor.”](#) In recent years, Nigeria has been rocked by ethnic and religious conflicts, with tens of thousands killed and whole communities devastated. In the 1990s, Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa led opposing, armed militias, dedicated to defending their respective communities as violence broke out in Kaduna, northern Nigeria. In pitched battles, Pastor James lost his hand and Imam Ashafa’s spiritual mentor and two close relatives were killed. Now the two men are co-directors of the Muslim-Christian Interfaith Mediation Centre in their city, leading task-forces to resolve conflicts across Nigeria. The movie [“The Imam and the Pastor”](#) explains how they made this remarkable transition. It is both a moving story of forgiveness and a case-study of a successful grass-roots initiative to rebuild communities torn apart by conflict.

2. The second ongoing practical example is taking place in the **Central African Republic (CAR)**. There, an Inter-religious Platform has taken a firm stand in managing conflict and violence in the CAR. It is comprised of the three most prominent religious leaders in CAR who have been calling for peace and social cohesion between their followers nationally and internationally. They have sought to move attention away from religious motives for violence, highlighting that religious differences did not cause the conflict. That has been their key message since the armed conflict began, although the platform was only officially created in 2016. The [Interfaith Platform](#) is composed of [Imam Kobine Layama](#) (head of the Central African Islamic Community – CICA), [Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga](#) who

represents Catholics and [Pastor Nicolas Guerekoyame-Gbangou](#) (Head of the Evangelical Alliance).

Those were examples of actions.

As examples of declarations to fight human trafficking allow me to quote the **“Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders Against Modern Slavery”** signed in Rome on the 2nd of December 2014 by His Holiness Pope Francis, as well as the Archbishop of Canterbury, and leaders of the Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu faiths. And I quote:

“We, the undersigned, are gathered here today for a historical initiative to inspire spiritual and practical action by all global faiths and people of good will everywhere to eradicate modern slavery across the world by 2020 and for all time. In the eyes of God each human being is a free person, whether girl, boy, woman or man, and is destined to exist for the good of all in equality and fraternity. Modern slavery, in terms of human trafficking, forced labour and prostitution, organ trafficking, and any relationship that fails to respect the fundamental conviction that all people are equal and have the same freedom and dignity, is a crime against humanity. We pledge ourselves here today to do all in our power, within our faith communities and beyond, to work together for the freedom of all those who are enslaved and trafficked so that their future may be restored. Today we have the opportunity, awareness, wisdom, innovation and technology to achieve this human and moral imperative.”

Religions promote the protection of human life and dignity of every human person.

Finally, I would like to quote His Holiness Pope Francis in his address to the participants in the Conference on **“International religious freedom and the global clash of values”** 20 June 2014:

“Religious freedom, acknowledged in constitutions and laws and expressed in consistent conduct, promotes the development of relationships of mutual respect among the diverse Confessions and their healthy collaboration with the State and political society, without confusion of roles and without antagonism.

In place of the global clash of values, it thus becomes possible to start from a nucleus of universally shared values, of global cooperation in view of the common good.”

And my last quote will be from the **Declaration “[Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together](#)”**, signed in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates) on 4th February last year by His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahamad Al-Tayyib. The final sentence appears most relevant to our discussion today, as it reads:

“This Declaration may constitute an invitation to reconciliation and fraternity among all believers, indeed among believers and non-believers, and among all people of good will; this Declaration may be an appeal to every upright conscience that rejects deplorable violence and blind extremism; an appeal to those who cherish the values of tolerance and fraternity that are promoted and encouraged by religions; this Declaration may be a witness to the greatness of faith in God that unites divided hearts and elevates the human soul; this Declaration may be a sign of the closeness between East and West, between North and South, and between all who believe that God has created us to understand one another, cooperate with one another and live as brothers and sisters who love one another. This is what we hope and seek to achieve with the aim of finding a universal peace that all can enjoy in this life.”

And I would like to highlight this quote:

“Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved.”

And, as a last word, now a quick look at the future.

“Education, human rights, and peace. The instruments of international action and the role of religions” - this was the title of the [Study Day organized by the Pontifical Lateran University on 31 October 2019](#). The seminar was organized in collaboration with the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

Pope Francis, with Muslim, Jewish, and Christian leaders in attendance, announced a global event, to take place on 14 May 2020 on the theme [Reinventing the Global Compact on Education](#).

“This meeting,” said Pope Francis, *“will rekindle our dedication for and with young people, renewing our passion for a more open and inclusive education, including patient listening, constructive dialogue and better mutual understanding. Never before has there been such need to unite our efforts in a broad educational alliance, to form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity.”*

In conclusion, I would like to launch an appeal to publicize and promote those good practices, to implement this Appeal and this Declaration, to support them and other similar initiatives so that religions would not be any more associated with violent extremism nor with human trafficking.

Thank you.