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BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 180626a

Tuesday 26.06.2018

Message of the Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

The following is the Message from the Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, His Eminence Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, for the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, held today.

Message

Today, 26 June, is the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, instituted by the United Nations on 7 December 1987 to strengthen action and cooperation, at national and international levels, in countering and promoting a greater knowledge of the phenomenon.

From the 2017 World Drug Report of the UNODC, it emerges that in 2015, around 250 million people around the world used drugs and of these, 29.5 million suffered from disorders caused by their consumption. In particular, among the 12 million who use intravenous drugs, more than half (6.1 million) are affected by hepatitis C, while 1.3 million live with both hepatitis C and the HIV/AIDS virus. Widespread damage is caused by the use and abuse of drugs, not only to health but also in terms of development, for peace and security, in all regions of the world. [1]

The lacerating drama of drugs is an evil that threatens the dignity and freedom to act of every person, and progressively breaks down the image that the Creator has formed in us. This scourge must be strongly condemned as it is fed by unscrupulous men who, giving in to the temptation of easy money, disseminate death by striking down hope and destroying many families.[2]

Drugs are a wound inflicted on our society, which traps many people in a spiral of suffering and alienation. There are many factors that lead towards drug dependency, such as social exclusion,[3] the absence of the family, social pressure, propaganda by traffickers, and the desire for new experiences.

It is important to promote a culture of solidarity and subsidiarity, oriented towards the common good; a culture that is opposed to selfishness and to utilitarian and economic logic, but which instead inclines towards the other, to listen, in a path of encounter and relations with our neighbour, especially when he is more vulnerable and fragile, as is the case with those who abuse drugs. As Pope Francis emphasizes, “every drug addict has a unique personal story and must be listened to, understood, loved, and insofar as possible, healed and purified. We cannot stoop to the injustice of categorizing drug addicts as if they were mere objects or broke machines; each person must be valued and appreciated in his or her dignity in order to enable them to be healed.”[4]

The young are the first victims of drugs. Immersed in a relativist and hedonist society, they receive proposals that alienate them from values, from a concrete reality tending towards a full realization of the self. The new generations often live in a “virtual” [5] world, in which they are offered “a wide range of opportunities to enjoy passing pleasures, which in the end are nothing but poisons that corrode, corrupt and kill. Step-by-step, a person begins to destroy himself and to destroy everything around him. The initial desire to flee, to seek out a moment of happiness, is transformed into the destruction of the entire person, with repercussions at every level of society”. [6]

It is clear, as Pope Francis affirms, that in many cases these forms of dependency are not a consequence of giving in to vice, but an effect of the dynamics of exclusion: “There is a global armament of drugs that are destroying this generation of young people, who are destined to be discarded!”. [7]

Incisive and concrete educational programmes must be proposed to our young people, to develop their potential and educate them in the joy of profoundness, not of superficiality.[8] In the process of helping them, human relations are important, inasmuch as “the call the joy and fullness of life are found within a cultural context, and one of social relations”. [9]

Even though prevention is a priority, it is also fundamental to work for the rehabilitation of drug victims in society, to restore to them the authentic joy of living,[10] so that they do not feel discriminated against or stigmatized, but rather welcomed and understood so as to take a path of inner renewal in search of goodness.

We must never forget that, “even if a person’s life is a disaster, destroyed by vices, by drugs or any other thing, God is in his life. ... Even if a person’s life is a terrain full of thorns and weeds, there is still a space in which the good seed can grow. We must trust in God”. [11] An example of this is given by the many young people who, wishing to free themselves of their drug dependency, make an effort to rebuild their life, looking ahead trustfully.

Vatican City, 26 June 2018

Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson

Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

[1] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, World Drug Report 2017, vol. 1 p. 9, 11.

[2] Cf. Francis, Homily for Holy Mass on the occasion of the Holy Father’s Apostolic Trip to Colombia, port zone of Contecar (Cartagena de Indias), 10 September 2017.

[3] Cf. 15th Ordinary General Assembly, Young people, the faith and vocation discernment, *Instrumentum Laboris*, Vatican City 2018, no. 7.

[4] Francis, Address to participants in the meeting sponsored by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on: "Narcotics: problems and solutions to this global issue", 24 November 2016.

[5] Cf. Francis, Meeting with the Diocese of Rome, Basilica of Saint John Lateran, 14 May 2018.

[6] Francis, Address to participants in the meeting sponsored by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on: "Narcotics: problems and solutions to this global issue", 24 November 2016.

[7] Cf. 15th Ordinary General Assembly, Young people, the faith and vocation discernment, *Instrumentum Laboris*, Vatican City 2018, no. 50.

[8] Cf. Francis, Address at the Meeting with the CELAM Executive Committee, Bogotá, 7 September 2017.

[9] Cf. 15th Ordinary General Assembly, Young people, the faith and vocation discernment, *Instrumentum Laboris*, Vatican City 2018, no. 144.

[10] Cf. Francis, Address to participants in the meeting sponsored by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on: "Narcotics: problems and solutions to this global issue", 24 November 2016.

[11] Message from Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin on behalf of the Holy Father Francis, for the 36th Meeting for Friendship among Peoples, 17 August 2015.
