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Audience with members of the Santa Marta Group

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Santa Marta Group.

The following is his address to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops,

Dear Friends,

I offer a cordial welcome to all of you who are present for the International Conference of the Santa Marta Group, which brings together leaders of various law enforcement, government and civic and religious organizations to share their expertise, experience and best practices in the task of preventing and combatting human trafficking and modern forms of slavery. I thank you for your commitment in seeking to eradicate this criminal activity that violates the dignity and rights of men, women and children and leaves long-lasting effects upon individual victims and the broader society.

In the years since its establishment, the Santa Marta Group has devoted itself to fostering an ever greater understanding of the scope and nature of human trafficking and to strengthening cooperation on the international, national and local levels so that effective ways to end this scourge may be found and that its victims may receive needed care, both physically and spiritually.

Sadly, modern forms of slavery continue to spread, even within the most developed areas of our world. It is my

hope that the fight against human trafficking will take into greater consideration a number of broader realities. These would include the responsible use of technology and social media, as well as the need for a renewed ethical vision of our political, economic and social life, one centred not on profit but on persons.

Here I would also mention the essential need to support, accompany and reintegrate the victims of human trafficking into our communities and assist them in the process of healing and the recovery of their self-esteem. Although the task is indeed daunting, I encourage you to persevere in your efforts to uphold the God-given dignity of every person and to defend the fundamental human rights of those who are all too often forgotten and have no voice. The Church remains grateful for every expression of fraternal charity and care shown to all who have been enslaved and exploited, for in this way, God's loving mercy becomes visible and the fabric of society is strengthened and renewed.

Once again, I express my gratitude for your commitment and cooperation in this vital area, and I offer my prayerful best wishes for your work. Upon you and your families and upon all those whom you serve, I invoke the Lord's blessings of wisdom and strength, and I ask you, please, to remember to pray for me. Thank you.
