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Message of the Holy Father on the occasion of the Tenth International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis on the occasion of the Tenth International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking, held today, liturgical memorial of Saint Josephine Bakhita, which takes as its theme this year: "Journeying in Dignity: Listen, Dream, Act":

Message of the Holy Father

Journeying in Dignity: Listen, Dream, Act

Dear sisters and dear brothers!

Today, the liturgical Memorial of Saint Josephine Bakhita, we celebrate the tenth World Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking. I associate myself wholeheartedly with all of you around the world, especially the young, who are working to combat this global scourge.

Together let us walk in the footsteps of Saint Bakhita, the religious Sister from Sudan, who as a child was sold into slavery and was a victim of traffickers. Let us remember the wrong she endured, her suffering but at the same time her strength and her journey of liberation and rebirth to a new life. Saint Bakhita encourages us to open our eyes and ears to see those who go unseen and to hear those who have no voice, to acknowledge the dignity of each person and to fight trafficking and all forms of exploitation.

Trafficking, in fact, often goes unseen. The media, thanks also to courageous reporters, have brought to light modern forms of slavery, but the culture of indifference tends to desensitize us. Let us help one another to be more responsive, to open our lives and hearts to our sisters and brothers who even now are being bought and sold as slaves. It is never too late to take action.

Thank God, many young people have taken up the challenge of this World Day against trafficking. Their enthusiasm and commitment show us the way: they remind us that we are called to *listen*, *dream* and *act* in order to counter trafficking.

First, it is essential to *listen* to those who are suffering. I think of the victims of wars and conflicts, those affected by climate change, those forced to migrate, and those, especially women and children, who are exploited sexually or in the workplace. May we listen to their cry for help and feel challenged by the stories they tell. Together with the victims and the young, let us once more *dream* of a world where all people can live with freedom and dignity.

Then, sisters and brothers, by the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, let us make this dream a reality by taking *concrete actions* to combat trafficking. Let us pray fervently and work proactively for this cause, the defence of human dignity, whether by prayer and action as individuals and families, or as parish and religious communities, as ecclesial associations and movements, and also in the various spheres of social and political life.

We know that the fight against trafficking can be won, but it is necessary to get to the root of the problem and eliminate its causes. I encourage you, then, to respond to this appeal for *transformation*, in memory of Saint Josephine Bakhita, who stands for all those men and women who, despite their enslavement, can still attain freedom. It is a call to take action, to mobilize all our resources in combatting trafficking and restoring full dignity to those who have been its victims. If we close our eyes and ears, if we do nothing, we will be guilty of complicity.

From my heart, I express my gratitude to everyone engaged in the celebration of this Day, and I bless all those who are committed to combatting trafficking and all forms of exploitation in order to build a world of fraternity and peace.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 8 February 2024
Memorial of Saint Josephine Bakhita.

FRANCIS
