



For immediate release

Catholic religious in Southeast Asia pledge to fight human trafficking

Pattaya, Thailand, December 12, 2016 – Catholic religious in six countries in ASEAN have made a joint declaration against human trafficking. This commitment was made as the delegates from 42 religious entities in Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand concluded a five-day meeting on “Integrity of the Human Person vis-à-vis Human Trafficking”.

They pledged to motivate and inspire their communities to fight for the freedom of all those who are trafficked and enslaved; to work with civil authorities, international and local NGOs, other faith communities and other people of good will to eradicate human trafficking; and to do all in their power to ensure that the dignity of victims of trafficking is restored, and to give them reason to hope.

The 72 delegates, including six laypersons, at the South East Asia Major Superiors (SEAMS) Congress XVI also drew up a plan of action to fight human trafficking that builds on the plan made at previous meeting held in Singapore in 2013.

“Is there Glory in the lowest?’ This question posed by Sam Keen in his book, Hymns to an Unknown God, challenges each of our congregations in our ministries, and especially in our work against human trafficking,” said Fr Apisit Kritsaralam CSsR, President of the Association of Major Religious Superiors in Thailand, which hosted SEAMS Congress XVI. “Together I hope we can rediscover the work of Redemption, Mercy and Emmanuel, God-with-us, in our ministry to the countless sisters and brothers wounded by the sins of humanity, society and the world.”

The delegates were joined by Bishop Phillip Banjong Chaiyara CSsR, President of Caritas Thailand, who shares their commitment to fight human trafficking.

“The dignity, basic rights and freedom of every human being is the will of God since the beginning, and no child, woman or man should be treated as a commodity or object for the profit of another person. As Religious and as Church, we must work together to eliminate human trafficking, this wickedness that Pope Francis has declared to be a crime

against humanity,” said Bishop Chaiyara.

Held at the Redemptorist Center in Pattaya from December 5 to 9, 2016, the SEAMS Congress XVI was organised by the Association of Major Religious Superiors in Thailand. The SEAMS Congress is held every three years to encourage and enable networking and collaboration among religious congregations in Southeast Asia.

This year’s Congress provided opportunities for networking and sharing of contacts and resources as well as input from experts from the International Organisation for Migration, Alliance Anti-Traffic, Talitha Kum International and Talitha Kum Thailand on the impact of globalisation on migration, fighting human trafficking through networking and the use of online media. The participants also learned about the local context from visits to a children’s home, a port and a government shelter. Each country also reported on its progress on commitments made in SEAMS Congress XV.

The Congress closed on a quote from *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation released in April following the Synods on the Family held in 2014 and 2015. “Migration is particularly dramatic and devastating to families and individuals when it takes place illegally and is supported by international networks of human trafficking ... Extreme poverty and other situations of family breakdown sometimes even lead families to sell their children for prostitution or for organ trafficking.” (*Amoris Laetitia* 46).

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Photographs are available upon request.