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PRESS RELEASE

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FAITH LEADERS IN MALAYSIA COMMIT TO FIGHTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

KUALA LUMPUR, 30 July, 2017: Ten leaders from different religions in Malaysia signed an Inter-Faith Joint Declaration against Human Trafficking, in an event hosted by the Catholic Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. They did so in solidarity with the millions of women, children and men across the world who are trafficked and enslaved.

The faith leaders jointly declared that “every girl, boy, woman and man is a free person, and all exist for the good of all in equality and fraternity. That people are trafficked and exploited physically, economically, sexually and psychologically for the profit, benefit and pleasure of others goes against the fundamental conviction that all people are equal and have the same freedom and dignity”.

The signatories to the declaration were Venerable Sing Kan (Malaysian Buddhist Association); Mr Vijaya Samarawickrama (Sasana Abhiwardhi Wardhana Society); Rev. Dr Eu Hong Seng (National Evangelical Christian Fellowship); Mr C.M. Kopalán (Malaysia Hindu Sangam); Mr Vijaya Segaran Vadivelloo (The Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Malaysia); Ms Loh Pai Ling (Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia); Rev. Dr Hermen Shastri (Council of Churches of Malaysia); Archbishop Julian Leow Beng Kim (Catholic Bishops Conference of Malaysia); Mr Jagjit Singh (Malaysian Gurdwara Council) and Daozhang Tan Hoe Chieow (Federation of Taoist Association Malaysia). The Mufti of Federal Territory and Dr Jasbir Singh (Sikh Naujawan Sabha Malaysia) were not able to attend but pledged their support for the cause.

The faith leaders were also the first to light up the virtual Tree of Hope, treesofhope.info, a website created to encourage people to take a first concrete action against human trafficking.

Also present to witness the signing of the declaration were Cardinal Soter Fernandez, Archbishop Emeritus Tan Sri Murphy Pakiam and Datin Paduka Mother A. Mangalam.

The historic joint declaration, held on the United Nations World Day against Trafficking in Persons, is an initiative spearheaded by the Catholic Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur in collaboration with the Conference of Religious Major Superiors Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei.

The United Nations defines human trafficking as "the recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person by such means as threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud or deception for the purpose of exploitation."

"This joint declaration is just our first step," said Most Reverend Julian Leow, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur. "People of faith must play their part in the fight against human trafficking, and I ask everyone to consider what each of us can do. It may be something as simple as talking about the issue with our friends, or learning how to spot a possible victim of human trafficking."

"On a broader level, the various religious groups can share resources on anti-human trafficking activities," he added.

The joint declaration comes a month after the release of the 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report by the US State Department. This year, Malaysia's ranking improved to Tier 2, after two years on the Tier 2 Watch List (2015 and 2016) and being in Tier 3 in 2014. In the 2017 report, the Malaysian government was commended for making significant efforts to fight human trafficking.

The event held at the premises of the Archbishop's residence in Bukit Nanas included a display of information on human trafficking by NGOs such as Tenaganita, SUKA Society, New Thessalonians Apostolate, Pusat Kebajikan Good Shepherd and the Kuala Lumpur Catholic Archdiocese Office of Human Development.

The Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur also launched an awareness campaign against human trafficking called "Burning Bush". The campaign targets the local parishes and aims to not only give a spiritual and biblical perspective with prayers and reflections on human trafficking, but to also raise awareness of what Pope Francis has described as a scourge on humanity.

The campaign website, burningbush.org.my, contains a host of information and activities for the local archdiocese against human trafficking.

"We want Catholics in the KL Archdiocese to join the fight against human trafficking," said Archbishop Leow. "Burning Bush will help the faithful learn about human trafficking and what is being done in the Archdiocese to fight it, and more importantly what they themselves can do."

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Note: In the signed declaration, Datuk R.S. Mohan Shan is named as the signatory for Malaysia Hindu Sangam, however on the day itself, Mr C.M. Kopalán participated as its representative.

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