

## **15 YEARS TOGETHER: THE MESSAGE FROM POPE FRANCIS**

Dear sisters and brothers of *Talitha Kum*!

I am pleased to welcome you at the end of your second General Assembly and on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of your network's foundation. I am very grateful for what you do, both individually and all together, to combat human trafficking, one of the most terrible scourges of our time.

Human trafficking is a "systemic" evil, and therefore we can and must eliminate it through a systematic, multi-level approach. Trafficking is fuelled by wars and conflicts, thrives on the effects of climate change and socio-economic disparities, and takes advantage of the vulnerability of those forced to migrate, as well as the conditions of inequality in which they find themselves, especially women and girls.

Trafficking is a "business" that disrespects and disregards human dignity, delivering large profits to the unscrupulous. Trafficking is constantly evolving and always finding new ways to develop, as it did during the pandemic. Yet we must not be discouraged. With the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ and the dedication of so many, we can succeed in eliminating it.

We need to continue along the path of what you in *Talitha Kum* have always done: to stand by the victims, listen to them, help them get back on their feet and together take action against trafficking.

To be truly effective against this odious criminal phenomenon, we need to be a community. This is well expressed by the theme of your assembly: *Journeying Together to End Human Trafficking: Compassion in Action for Transformation*.

This is no easy task, yet during these past 15 years you have shown us, on every level, that it can be done. *Talitha Kum* has become a widespread global network and, at the same time, deeply rooted in the local Churches. It has become a reference point for victims, their families, those at risk and the most vulnerable communities. Furthermore, your appeals act as a strong reminder to local and national institutions and governments to take up their responsibilities in this regard.

I encourage you to continue on this path, furthering prevention and care, and weaving together many valuable relationships that are indispensable in order to combat and defeat trafficking.

Dear sisters and brothers, I join you in thanking the Lord for all the work he has enabled you to do over these years. I will read your document carefully and promote it. May Our Lady always accompany and protect you. I offer you and your communities my heartfelt blessing. Please continue to pray for me. Thank you!

Pope Francis

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