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**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE LEO XIV
FOR THE 12th WORLD DAY OF PRAYER AND AWARENESS
AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

[8 February 2026]

[**Multimedia**]

Peace begins with dignity: a global call to end human trafficking

Dear brothers and sisters,

On the occasion of the 12th World Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking I firmly renew the Church's urgent call to confront and bring an end to this grave crime against humanity.

This year in particular, I wish to recall the greeting of the Risen Lord: "Peace be with you" (Jn 20:19). These words are more than a salutation; they offer a path toward a renewed humanity. True peace begins with the recognition and protection of the God-given dignity of every person. Yet, in an age marked by escalating violence, many are tempted to seek peace "through weapons as a condition for asserting one's own dominion" ([*Address to Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*](#), 9 January 2026). Moreover, in situations of conflict, the loss of human life is too often dismissed by warmongers as "collateral damage," sacrificed in the pursuit of political or economic interests.

Sadly, the same logic of dominion and disregard for human life also fuels the scourge of human trafficking. Geopolitical instability and armed conflicts create fertile ground for traffickers to exploit the most vulnerable, especially displaced persons, migrants and refugees. Within this broken paradigm, women and children are the most impacted by this heinous trade. Furthermore, the widening gap between the rich and the poor forces many into precarious circumstances, leaving them susceptible to the deceptive promises of recruiters.

This phenomenon is particularly disturbing in the rise of so-called “cyber slavery,” whereby individuals are lured into fraudulent schemes and criminal activities, such as online fraud and drug smuggling. In such cases, the victim is coerced into assuming the role of perpetrator, exacerbating their spiritual wounds. These forms of violence are not isolated incidents, but symptoms of a culture that has forgotten how to love as Christ loves.

In the face of these grave challenges, we turn to prayer and awareness. Prayer is the “small flame” that we must guard amidst the storm, as it gives us the strength to resist indifference to injustice. Awareness enables us to identify the hidden mechanisms of exploitation in our neighborhoods and in digital spaces. Ultimately, the violence of human trafficking can be overcome only through a renewed vision that beholds every individual as a beloved child of God.

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who serves as the hands of Christ by reaching out to victims of trafficking, including international networks and organizations. I would also like to acknowledge the survivors who have become advocates in support of other victims. May the Lord bless them for their courage, fidelity and tireless commitment.

With these sentiments, I entrust those who commemorate this day to the intercession of Saint Josephine Bakhita, whose life stands as a powerful witness of hope in the Lord who loved her to the end (cf. *Jn* 13:1). Let us all join the journey toward a world where peace is not merely the absence of war, but is “unarmed and disarming,” rooted in full respect for the dignity of all.

From the Vatican, 29 January 2026

LEO PP. XIV

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