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Fighting poverty would limit trafficking, Vatican's U.N. observer says

by Catholic News Service

United Nations — The political commitment to combat human trafficking must be backed by concrete actions to ensure that victims gain their freedom from modern-day slavery, said the Vatican's representative to the United Nations.

Addressing a U.N. General Assembly meeting to develop a global plan to address human trafficking May 13-14, Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, said that unless the "dark reality of consumerism" is addressed, the exploitation of people for sex and labor will continue.

"Trafficking in person constitutes a shameful crime against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights," Chullikatt said. "Those who commit such crimes debase themselves and poison human solidarity."

He reminded the meeting that "people are never to be used or treated as instruments for unscrupulous profit-mongering" through forced slavery.

The archbishop said alongside social, political and legal steps to stop trafficking, the world must work to address societal factors that make human trafficking possible.

Severe poverty and the "commodification of human life" are the most significant factors the world must address if trafficking is to be reduced and eventually eradicated, he explained.

"Such commodification can be seen in the women and girls who are trafficked each year for the sole purpose of making money from the sale of their bodies," he said. "There is indeed an urgent need here to

challenge lifestyles and models of behavior, particularly with regard to the image of women, which have generated what has become a veritable industry of sexual exploitation."

Extreme poverty, the archbishop added, "often drives those desirous of a better future into the hands of those preying upon the vulnerability of the poor and defenseless."

"These individuals, prompted by a genuine desire to provide for themselves and their needy families, too easily become unsuspecting victims of those who make false promises of a better future in another country or community. Our efforts to address human trafficking are inherently linked, therefore, to our determination to address poverty eradication and lack of equal economic opportunity" he said.

Chullikatt also cited the efforts of Catholic institutions worldwide to aid trafficking victims, pledging that the church will continue to "stand in solidarity" with victims and "we will not cease in our efforts to ensure that today's victims of human trafficking become tomorrow's survivors."

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