



## Background

The Santa Marta Group (SMG) is an alliance of international police chiefs and bishops from around the world working together with civil society to help eradicate human trafficking and modern day slavery.

Launched in 2014 by Pope Francis and led by Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, the SMG grew out of a unique partnership established in 2012 between the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and the Metropolitan Police's human trafficking unit in London. This developed into cooperation at strategic and operational levels and provided the impetus for greater collaboration between the Church and police in London to identify and help victims and vulnerable communities.

In April 2014, at its inaugural conference in the Vatican attended by police chiefs, civil society leaders and bishops from twenty-four countries, Pope Francis endorsed the SMG, telling the participants: "Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society - a scourge upon the body of Christ. It is a crime against humanity".

The Santa Marta Group works to oppose that crime. Chiefs of Police, in the presence of Pope Francis, signed a personal Declaration of Commitment to work together with the Church to develop strategies in prevention, pastoral care and re-integration, and to place the victims at the centre of the law enforcement process.

Since then, two full conferences of the Santa Marta Group have taken place, one in London in December 2014 and the following year in Madrid. These conferences, along with several regional gatherings, have established effective working relationships, exchanges on best practice, information and case studies, and focused future collaboration. These conferences serve to unite leaders in the Church and police agencies across borders to help them deal with major international crime, estimated by the United Nations to be worth \$32bn a year. However, the SMG is not a series of conferences but a process that identifies issues of modern slavery and brings together those who have the decision-making authority to implement strategic change.

At the heart of this work is creating trust, partnerships, and processes that focus on the dignity and protection of the human person.



## Commitment

When the inaugural Santa Marta Group conference drew to a close in Rome on 10 April 2014, police chiefs, bishops and government officials from around the world made a declaration of commitment in the fight to bring an end to human trafficking and domestic slavery. It reads:

*On this date 10th April 2014 in the Vatican, senior law enforcement officials and representatives of the Catholic Church met to plan ways of together combating Human Trafficking and Slavery.*

*The Holy Father Pope Francis has endorsed this event and has stated:*

*“I exhort the international community to adopt an even more unanimous and effective strategy against human trafficking, so that in every part of the world, men and women may no longer be used as a means to an end, and that their inviolable dignity may always be respected.”*

*As senior law enforcement officials within the international community, we commit to eradicate the scourge of this serious criminal activity, which abuses vulnerable people.*

*This conference is part of a process where we work together on the international stage to develop strategies in prevention, pastoral care and re-integration, placing the victim at the centre of all we do.*

*I make a personal commitment to developing partnerships with the Church and civil society to bring to justice those who are responsible for these horrendous crimes and to alleviate the suffering of the victims.*