



## **Former ICN President Annette Kennedy meets Pope Francis in the Vatican and highlights nurses' role in stopping human trafficking**

**Geneva, Switzerland; 30 May 2022** - Former ICN President Annette Kennedy has met the Pope at a human trafficking conference in the Vatican. She spoke about the importance of nurses and other healthcare professionals recognising human trafficking and taking action to prevent it.

Ms Kennedy was acting as a moderator at the event, which was run by Santa Marta Group, a partnership between the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and police chiefs, set up in 2014 to work towards the elimination of human trafficking.

Delegates at the conference heard of trafficking and forced labour in supply chains, including in medical supplies to the United Kingdom National Health Service and other health systems. They were told of the scale of the problem, thought to earn the criminals behind it more than 150 billion US Dollars per year. Up to 40 million people suffer various kinds of abuse worldwide, including sexual exploitation, forced criminality, domestic servitude and the selling of children for their organs or for barbaric rituals.

The conference heard that a high proportion of trafficked people come into contact with a healthcare professional, echoing discussions at ICN's 2019 Congress, where the important role nurses can play in the identification of victims of human trafficking and its prevention were highlighted.

“As a nurse the conference reinforced my belief that healthcare professionals have a major role to play in ending this serious crime. Healthcare professionals will often encounter victims of human trafficking, so knowing how to identify them and what to do is crucial. But there is also a responsibility on governments and health services to prevent the billions spent in procurement each year from being tainted by forced labour or child exploitation.”

Ms Kennedy said meeting Pope Francis was humbling and had re-energised her own resolve to do all she can to work with nurses and communities to rid the world of human trafficking. She said a London nurse in an emergency department had noticed what she believed to be human trafficking, and the action she took led to scores of victims being supported and the conviction of several traffickers who had been operating across Europe.

“Human trafficking is the deliberate commodification of a human life by another and should not be tolerated anywhere. As nurses we must better recognise and understand our role in fighting this evil,” Ms Kennedy said.

Pope Francis endorsed the efforts of Santa Marta Group saying: “Sadly, modern forms of slavery continue to spread, even within the most developed areas of the world. It is

my hope that the fight against human trafficking will take into greater consideration a number of broader realities. This would include the responsible use of technology and social media, as well as the need for a renewed ethical vision of our political, economic and social life, one centred not on profit but on persons.”

For more information about the Santa Marta Group go to its website [here](#).

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