

Vatican, Anglicans, Muslims sign accord against human trafficking

By CAROL GLATZ

VATICAN CITY (CNS)

— The Vatican, the Anglican Communion and a leading Muslim institution signed a historic agreement to work together to end human trafficking worldwide by 2020.

The new accord, signed during a Vatican news conference March 17, launched the beginning of the Global Freedom Network, which hopes to expand to include all the world's major faiths.

The global initiative aims to prevent modern forms of slavery; to protect, rescue and rehabilitate victims; and to promote concrete measures that condemn or criminalize human trafficking.

In a joint statement, the accord's signatories called human trafficking and modern forms of slavery "crimes against humanity" and called for urgent action by all faith communities to join the effort to "set free the most oppressed of our brothers and sisters."

"Only by activating, all over the world, the ideals of faith and of shared human values can we marshal the spiritual power,

the joint effort and the liberating vision, to eradicate modern slavery and human trafficking from our world and for all time," the joint statement said.

"This evil is manmade and can be overcome by faith-inspired human will and human effort," it said.

Signing the agreement were:

— Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, representing Pope Francis.

— Mahmoud Azab, repre-

sented Ahmad el-Tayeb, the grand imam of Al-Azhar University — a leading Sunni Muslim institution in Cairo.

— Anglican Archbishop David Moxon, the archbishop of Canterbury's representative in Rome.

— Andrew Forrest, founder of Walk Free Foundation — a major partner and organizer of the new network.

In the agreement, all parties pledged to pursue concrete plans of action as well as moments for prayer, fasting and raising awareness.

Other aims of the agreement included:

— Getting faith communities to ensure their "supply chains" and investments are free from using or profiting from slave labor.

— Getting governments and business worldwide also to "slavery proof" the goods and services they procure, produce or sell.

— Educating families, schools, worshippers and groups about how to detect and report possible instances of human slavery and trafficking.

— Convincing the world's most developed nations

to condemn modern slavery and trafficking, and support a global fund to help poorer countries enact and enforce anti-trafficking measures.

The Global Freedom Network took root during a June 2013 meeting between Pope Francis and Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury, spiritual leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion, when the two men looked for ways to pursue concrete cooperation, Archbishop Moxon said. The

idea for the network continued to develop during subsequent anti-trafficking conferences and initiatives held at the Vatican.

The network is one of the first global initiatives launched by the Vatican, the Anglican Communion and a major Muslim institution, organizers said.

Of the many issues the faith communities could have chosen to cooperate together on, Archbishop Moxon said, they chose human trafficking because it was an area where the Catholic Church and the Anglicans had already been actively working together for decades in a number of partnerships on local and national levels.

"What's new is the global cooperation," he said.

But trafficking in particular was of urgent concern, he said, because it has become such an enormous, global problem that it's proven "resistant" to government, legal and police efforts to fight it, he said.

With at least 30 million men, women and children caught in the snares of traffickers, "the project needs us joined together; none of us is as strong as all of us and it needs a combined approach," the Anglican archbishop said.

Forrest said it was significant the agreement was signed on St. Patrick's Day as the saint himself "was a slave and turned to God" during his pain and suffering.

He said the initiative was being funded by himself and his wife through the Global Fund to End Slavery.

He said he began the Walk Free Foundation after his daughter volunteered to work at an orphanage in Nepal and discovered the institution was, in essence, a marketplace for selling Nepalese children to countries "in India, the Middle

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left had been severely disfigured or mentally handicapped so, therefore, were difficult to sell, to be blunt," he said.

Later when he visited child victims in Nepal receiving care after their abduction, he said the "terror and the disfigurement and the great and long term mental harm was raw" and evident in the children.

"The revulsion and the fear that just an approaching man gave them — the terror and the bloodcurdling scream when you just tried to comfort them," he said, those were the moments that convinced him "to spend a part of my life eliminating and extinguishing slavery."